

Running Head: CID OF “DEPENDENT” IMMIGRANT WOMEN

**Career Identity Development of “Dependent” Immigrant Women: A Qualitative  
Exploration**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the proposed study was to understand the process of career identity development among women immigrants arriving as applicants with dependent status, where career identity refers to a generalized perception of one’s career-related interests and potential in terms of acceptable career roles. Previous research has shown that the majority of dependent applicants under the economic class of immigrants are women and constitute a group of talented persons, possessing the skills to contribute positively to Canada’s economy. However, immigrant women who arrive on a dependent visa to Canada have largely been ignored within immigrant literature. Exploring their career-related experiences upon immigration may assist in understanding the effect of these experiences on their developing career identity. This in turn may lead to useful information in terms of how to tap into their potential and help them realize their career goals, within an evolving process of career development. Adopting a constructivist approach, a qualitative enquiry inspired by a grounded theory methodology was carried out to identify some of the key themes relevant to immigrant women’s career identity development and possible interactions between those themes. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit six participants for the study. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with each participant. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2012) six-phase method of conducting thematic analysis to generate themes and subthemes. Eight main themes were generated and include: On board the Canadian dream, Coming to terms with “dependent” status, Maintaining equilibrium, Tipping point, Grieving the loss of preferred career trajectory, Taking agency, Redirecting one’s career path, and Emergence of a strengthened career identity. Findings from the study shed light on some of the gender-specific experiences that women immigrants undergo in their career journey, and may provide useful information to career counsellors who play a critical role in helping immigrants navigate through career transitions in a new country.

Dedicated to my strong and beautiful daughters, Anya and Diya, who continue to be the light of my life and a constant source of inspiration.

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## **CHAPTER I: Introduction**

### **A Prelude**

The current study is an exploration of the career identity development (CID) of women immigrants arriving to Canada on a dependent visa, with their husbands as principal applicants. However, before I embark on this journey, I would like to elaborate a bit on my own background and personal connection to the topic of career identity development. It all began about ten years ago when I left my country of origin to migrate to the United States of America on a “dependent” visa. Despite having a sound educational background and opportunity to work at an American university, I was unable to secure a paid position due to America’s legal policy that debarred dependents from being granted a work visa. Six years later, I relocated to Canada, once again on a dependent visa. This time the intersectionality of gender and entry status prevented me from achieving my career goals at the pace I wanted to, due to personal and systemic issues. At the same time, after spending several years in these two developed nations, I was also acutely aware of some of the privileges afforded to me in terms of higher quality of life and increased educational opportunities to fulfill some cherished career goals. With time, I realized that each of these experiences had directly or indirectly shaped my conceptions of my career-related motivations and potential. This made me wonder if other women immigrants arriving as “dependents” encountered similar experiences during their career adjustment in a host country.

My previous research experience also contributed to my interest in this topic. I had the opportunity of collaborating on a research project that sought to investigate the issue of attrition of women within science-based careers. Engagement in this project opened my eyes to the number of perceived educational and occupational barriers that women face in achieving their career goals. As a member of the immigrant community, I had often heard personal narratives from friends and acquaintances recounting their challenges and successes while trying to establish a career in America and/or Canada. Also, being a female immigrant, I could relate well to some of the experiences that my counterparts faced as they strived towards achieving their career goals in a land foreign to them. Through this study, I hoped to learn more about immigrant women’s career-related experiences pre- and post-migration, and how they perceived those experiences as impacting their CID. From the perspective of counselling psychology, I also

wondered how this information could be utilized effectively with immigrant clients to enhance their career adjustment.

### **Background to the Study**

Immigrants are integral to Canada’s population. The proportion of immigrant population has been on a continuous rise since the last three decades, and constituted 20.7 % of Canada’s population in 2011 (Morency, Malenfant, & MacIsaac, 2017). Much of Canada’s immigration policy is built to meet the economic needs of the country and, likewise, policies are tailored to successfully integrate potential immigrants into the Canadian labour market. Yet, employment-related issues remain the number one concern for most immigrants upon arrival to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007). Within immigrant literature, while there has been immense focus on the career development process of principal applicants from home to host country (Cooke, 2007; Iredale, 2005; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006), little attention has been devoted to the career development of their accompanying partners, also known as “dependents” in the context of immigration.

A gendered pattern of migration exists, where men migrate to places in search of work and their wives “follow them” (Boyle, Cooke, Halfacree, & Smith, 1999; Lundberg & Pollak, 2003; Spitze, 1984). This is reflected in how dependent applicants across all three classes of immigrants (economic, family, and refugees) are disproportionately women (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013). While immigrants in general encounter several barriers with regard to finding employment—one among several aspects of CID—women immigrants face additional challenges due to their intersectionality of race, gender, and immigrant status (Adsera & Chiswick, 2007; Antecol, Cobb-Clark, & Trejo, 2003). Previous research has indicated that arriving to Canada on a dependent visa puts women at yet another level of disadvantage in terms of employment outcomes, regardless of their professional backgrounds (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Purkayastha, 2005). The human capital approach (Mincer, 1978; Sandell, 1977), and its extension known as the family investment hypothesis (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2009; Worswick, 1999), construes the primary objective of migrating families as maximizing the family’s overall economic gain by investing fully in the career of the member designated as the primary earner. However, investment in one family member often comes at the cost of career growth opportunities for other family members, such as dependent spouses. Further, due to gender-based roles, women often end up shouldering most of the responsibilities related to

childcare and domestic work, particularly due to a lack of support networks in host countries (Cooke, 2001; Ho, 2006; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; Purkayastha, 2005).

Although many immigrant women possess skills and held professional roles in their home countries, they tend to take up temporary and low paying jobs to supplement family income (Graham & Thurston, 2005). The result is “compromised careers” upon migration (Suto, 2009, p. 421). Abrupt disruption of seemingly smooth career trajectories due to migration can further lead many women to question their career identity (De Silva, 2010). Despite skilled immigrant women nurturing dreams of pursuing career goals upon migration, holding promise of successful career integration, and possessing potential to contribute to host country’s labour market (Kofman & Raghuram, 2006), their migration experiences in the context of career, until recently, largely remain under-researched. A primary objective of this study was to give voice to this marginalized section of the immigrant population by exploring their career-related experiences, particularly related to pre- and post-migration. Accessing this knowledge may enable a better understanding of immigrant women, particularly dependent applicants’ developing career identity in the context of migratory experiences.

A review of the literature also suggests that negative stereotyping of migrant women as dependents, employed in domestic roles (Fleming, 1981; Morokvasic, 1983), or passive rather than active individuals often fails to consider the inner strength and coping resources immigrant women utilize to deal with challenges associated during career transition (Koert, Borgen, & Amundson, 2011). This stereotypical image is reflected in the kind of labels used, such as “tied-movers” (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Compton & Pollak, 2007) or “trailing spouses” (Cooke, 2001; van Der Klis & Mulder, 2008), to characterize the accompanying spouses of primary movers under different migratory contexts. Moreover, much of the immigrant literature seems to be overly focused on the challenges of finding employment, rather than focus on the broader phenomenon of career development and favourable accounts and circumstances therein. These disparities may cloud a thicker account of immigrant women’s career development over time that both includes what challenging and facilitating experiences might shape career identity and how. Thus, another aim of this research was to ensure both challenging and facilitative aspects of immigration to Canada were explored in the context of CID among women immigrants.

Finally, as quantitative approaches seem to dominate research conducted on immigrants’ career development to date, in the current study I adopted a qualitative approach inspired by a

grounded theory methodology. This methodology allowed for a more constructivist approach to forefront the under-represented career-related experiences of immigrant women.

### **Thesis Overview**

The presentation of this study has been organized into five chapters, including this chapter which starts with my interest in the topic of CID and further providing a background to the study. In Chapter Two, I review the literature on career development of immigrants with a specific focus on issues that women immigrants face in their attempts to establish careers in a host country. I also review the concept of identity as a context-dependent construct and subsequently discuss development of career identity by drawing upon constructivist approaches. Situating my study in related literature, I provide a rationale for the study and the research questions pursued. In Chapter Three, I describe the chosen methodology of a grounded theory inspired approach—an approach well suited to explore the development of career identity as a process unfolding over time. Procedures applied for data collection, data analysis, and establishing trustworthiness are also detailed in this chapter. In Chapter Four, I present the results by including verbatim quotes from participants to uncover themes and subthemes generated in relation to their CID. Finally, in Chapter Five, I discuss my interpretation of the results in light of the existing literature. The chapter concludes with implications of the findings related to counselling practice and immigration policy in Canada, limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature related to immigration with a specific focus on career-related issues that immigrants face upon their arrival to Canada. I first present an overview of Canada’s immigration policy and highlight the characteristics of economic migrants, followed by a discussion on the gendered pattern of migration. Further, I review the literature related to the established link between employment and psychological well-being of immigrants along with the documented barriers and facilitators to immigrants’ employment. Literature regarding immigrants’ career-related aspirations and expectations, and post-migratory career decisions and their impact on career trajectories, is also reviewed. I next discuss the concept of identity and self-concept in a career context as well as types of work-related identities. Later on, the development of career identity is reviewed in the context of a constructivist approach. I conclude the chapter by providing a rationale for the proposed study, including research questions that I pursued in this project.

Before presenting a review of the literature, it is important to define some key constructs used in this study. Although this study focused on the exploration of CID, which will be discussed later in this chapter, it would be worthwhile to first briefly distinguish some terms that are closely related to career, such as job, occupation, and employment. *Career* is understood as an over-arching and inclusive term that refers to pursuits of an individual’s work and leisure activities over a lifetime (Sharf, 2006). According to Sharf, (2006), *jobs* “refer to positions requiring specific skills within one organization” (p. 3), whereas *occupations* refer to “similar jobs found in many organizations” (p. 3). Therefore, while a job may typically refer to a short-term activity, career refers to a long-term endeavour consisting of a series of jobs undertaken in a field that defines career. Likewise, the term *employment* refers to the state of having paid work (Employment, 2017).

### Overview of Canada’s Immigration System

Canada attracts one of the highest number of immigrants in the world, with 1 in every 5 Canadians having immigrant status (Alexander, Burleton, & Fong, 2012). According to the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) website at the time of this study, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt *multiculturalism* as a national policy in 1971, conveying a strong message of being a culturally diverse and inclusive nation. Therefore, it is not surprising that

Canada is widely viewed as a popular destination for thousands of immigrants across the world (Michalowski & Tran, 2008), although the circumstances under which people migrate to Canada may vary greatly (Blysmá & Yohani, 2014; Chen, 2008). For some, migration is influenced by what may be referred to as *push* factors in their countries of origin such as political and social turmoil, and lack of security, while for others it is *pull* factors in the host country, such as better employment and educational opportunities. Immigrants themselves view Canada as offering economic and political security, better career prospects, and a high quality of life for them and their loved ones (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007).

The immigration policy of Canada is built to primarily meet the economic needs of the country and, to a lesser extent, reunite families and welcome vulnerable people (Morency, Malenfant, & MacIsaac, 2017). These objectives are reflected in the three broad categories by which immigrants are admitted to Canada, namely the economic class immigrants, family class immigrants, and refugees. In view of Canada’s immigration policy directive to attract highly skilled and educated people, immigrants under the economic class constitute about 60% of the total immigrant population (CIC, 2012).

### **Economic Class of Immigrants**

Economic migrants are admitted through programs such as the Federal Skilled Worker Program, Provincial Nominee Program, Canadian Experience Class, and Start-up Business Class, to name a few. In general, they are admitted on their likelihood of success in the Canadian labour market or business (CIC, 2011). Although the selection criteria to admit immigrants through a point system has undergone few changes in the past, it is primarily developed to maximize immigrants’ likelihood of participation in the Canadian labour market (Reitz, 2001). According to CIC’s website, at the time of writing this report the selection criteria includes previous education, employment history, and language (English and/or French) abilities of the applicant. Additional points are granted if applicants are between 18-46 years of age (with maximum points awarded for being between 18-35 years of age) and have a permanent job offer in Canada prior to arrival. Finally, criteria which demonstrate the applicant’s potential for high adaptability are also considered, which include spouse’s language proficiency in English and/or French, Canadian credentials (education plus work experience), and presence of relatives for both spouse and applicant. According to CIC (2010), the point system has been largely successful in addressing Canada’s major immigration objectives by meeting the short-term and long-term

needs for skilled professionals. Therefore, immigrants under the economic class represent a group of highly educated, economically motivated, and career-oriented individuals (Chen, 2008) who expect to integrate within the workforce as soon as initial demands related to settlement are resolved. However, findings from Statistics Canada’s (2007) Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) conducted between 2001 and 2005 showed that the primary concern for most immigrants upon arrival, as well as four years into their stay, related to finding an adequate job. In this survey, about 67% of the respondents belonged to the economic class.

According to Canada’s immigration system, the person applying for immigration is referred to as the principal applicant and the accompanying spouse is referred to as the dependent applicant. However, within immigrant literature, the career-related experiences of the spouse—or “dependents”—accompanying the principal applicants remain relatively under-represented as compared to the career development process of principal applicants from home to host country (Cooke, 2007; Iredale, 2005; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006).

### **Gendered Migration**

Research suggests that migration is a predominantly gendered phenomenon. Most migratory decisions are initiated by men, while women accompany them as their wives or dependents (Boyle, Cooke, Halfacree, & Smith, 1999; Human Development Report, 2009). Until recently, most couple’s migratory decisions were largely influenced by the male member’s employment-related prospects and earning potential (Spitze, 1984), which has resulted in most women migrating to host destinations as “followers” (Inglis, 2003). This scenario seems to be applicable to the Canadian context as well, where about 80% of immigrants arriving as dependent applicants across all three categories (economic, family, and refugee class) are women (CIC, 2013). Within different contexts of migration, dependent spouses have often been referred to as “tied-movers” (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Compton & Pollak, 2007; Mincer, 1978) or “trailing spouses” (Cooke, 2001; van Der Klis & Mulder, 2008)—terms that imply a subservient position of the dependent spouse vis-à-vis the primary mover. For instance, in studies specifically related to international foreign transfers, trailing spouses have been depicted as wives trailing behind passively and facing issues related to their new identity in a cross-cultural environment (Arieli, 2007; Beaverstock, 1991; Findlay, 1995). Others have used the term trailing spouse in their research more for descriptive purposes rather than a derogatory term, where one partner is responsible for the relocation of another within the context of expatriate transfers

(Braseby, 2010). Regardless, these terms can have varying effects on women; for instance, while some women believe the label “trailing spouse” adequately represented their experience, others found it demeaning and contentious (Bayes, 1989).

Studies have found that dependent applicants, regardless of gender, experience slower career mobility upon migration than principal applicants and are often unable to compensate for this disadvantage over time (Banerjee & Phan, 2015). Within an immigration context, women with dependent status tend to suffer from a cumulative disadvantage, such that gender/race hierarchies intersect with personal and workplace barriers that affect them adversely in their attempts to re-establish themselves professionally (Purkayastha, 2005). Moreover, despite being qualified and willing to work, skilled immigrant women, tend to place family success above individual success and may experience poorer employment outcomes than their male counterparts (Branden, 2014; Iredale, 2005), which may have implications for a woman’s career upon migration. Previous research shows that dependent immigrant women possessing skills and showing promise to integrate into the host country’s labour market, until recently, have largely been ignored in the literature (Purkayastha, 2005). The invisibility of dependent women within immigrant literature signals an apparent underutilization of their skills in countries that rely heavily on immigration as a means to economic growth. It also indicates a need to incorporate their career-related experiences while planning immigration policies to have a better understanding of how immigration affects the career adjustment of families immigrating as a whole.

I next review some of the documented career-related expectations and experiences of immigrants upon migration. This part of the literature review serves as a backdrop to contextualizing immigrants’ experiences, including those of women immigrants, and sets the stage for subsequently discussing constructs related to CID.

### **Link between Employment and Psychological Well-Being of Immigrants**

Newcomers to Canada often represent a healthy group of individuals due to the immigration selection process (Newbold, 2006). Referred to as the *healthy migrant effect* (Kramer, Tracey, & Ivey, 1999), immigrants upon arrival are found to be healthier than most Canadian citizens (Statistics Canada, 2005). However, studies have found that soon after migration, immigrants’ overall health begins to decline (Ng, Wilkins, Gendron, & Berthelot, 2005). Their health recovery takes place only after several years into their settlement, when

immigrants have adapted at the linguistic, cultural, economic, and interpersonal levels (Health Canada, 1999).

Regarded as a reliable indicator of immigrant’s overall adjustment (McIsaac, 2003), employment tends to contribute to immigrants’ sense of purpose, status, and identity, along with helping them build social interactions (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Alternatively known as *economic adaptation*, Arthur and Collins (2010) conceptualized this term as immigrants achieving a sense of accomplishment by contributing economically to a country. Yet compared to their Canadian counterparts, and regardless of gender, immigrants experience lower levels of employment and earnings (Frenette & Morissette, 2003; Picot, Hou, & Coulombe, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2008a). For immigrants specifically, unemployment and the economic disadvantage they face as compared to their Canadian counterparts have been shown to result in feelings of alienation, chronic stress, negative self-concept, and frustration, which adversely impact their psychological well-being and adaptation (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008). Research has identified several barriers that immigrants face with respect to employment, as discussed in the next section. Owing to the fact that employment and job-related experiences contribute to the career development of immigrants, the following section on barriers and facilitators to economic integration will be discussed in light of how it impacts their overall career growth.

### **Barriers to Immigrants’ Employment**

Generally speaking, Canada is regarded as a model nation in terms of its “perceived success at attracting and retaining a disproportionate share of high-quality migrants” (Alexander, Burleton, & Fong, 2012, p. 6). Although the point system was initially developed to increase immigrants’ participation in the Canadian labour market, there has been a continuous decline in immigrants’ employment outcomes (Desjardins & Cornelson, 2011; Reitz, 2001); this reflects a paradoxical situation for many immigrants, as pointed out by several scholars (Khan, 2007; Tang, Oatley, & Toner, 2007). According to Tang and colleagues (2007), the treatment meted out to economic migrants seems to be flawed and unfair, “in that the same foreign education and work experience that are judged to be sufficient to permit migration, are insufficient to access professional work” (p. 288). Arthur and Collins (2010) point out two additional paradoxes that immigrants face. Firstly, immigrants seek Canadian experience to increase their employment prospects, yet their lack of Canadian experience is regarded as a primary obstacle that precludes

them from contributing to the economy. Secondly, immigrants tend to face rejections for higher-level positions in view of their communication issues and lack of Canadian experience, yet at the same time are considered overqualified for lower-level positions. Several individual and systemic barriers contribute to the challenges immigrants face in settling back into a career post-migration. Some of the main barriers are discussed below, namely devaluation of academic credentials, language issues, lack of social and cultural capital, racism and discrimination, gender issues, and entry status.

**Devaluation of academic credentials.** Statistics suggest that recent immigrants to Canada are among the most educated immigrants to date (Statistics Canada, 2008b). Yet, finding employment that matches immigrants’ level of education and training is a long-standing issue (Picot & Sweetman, 2005). One of the foremost barriers that immigrants face includes devaluation of foreign academic credentials and lack of Canadian work experience (Sakamoto, Chin, & Young, 2010; Weiner, 2008). Studies have shown that education obtained in foreign countries offers lower return in the Canadian labour market as compared to education obtained in Canada (Alboim, Finnie, & Meng, 2005; Schaafsma & Sweetman, 2001). Immigrants often experience “de-skilling” which is regarded as the non-recognition of foreign credentials and experience, and whereby immigrants are subsequently unable to access their pre-migration occupations (Bauder, 2003; Tolley, 2003). It has become fairly commonplace to hear stories of overqualified immigrants doing jobs such as driving taxicabs and delivery pizza vans after finding themselves unable to adjust to the work-life reality of the host country (Majumdar, 2004). This indeed presents a sad state of affairs as newcomers are often unable to integrate into the Canadian economy as expected (Duffy, 2000).

Unable to assess the validity of their credentials prior to arrival in Canada (Khan, 2007; McIsaac, 2003), immigrants’ expectations of integration into the workforce often come crashing down. The lack of a centralized agency in Canada to evaluate foreign credentials and varying procedures to provide recertification within each profession and sub specialization exacerbates the issue of skill discounting (Guo, 2009). Blysm and Yohani (2014) note that professional immigrants in particular face issues related to skill discounting “as they attempt to work in their pre-migration occupation, regardless of the reputation of their educational program, years of experience, and pre-emigration standing in the field” (p. 260). As a result, more than half of immigrants end up switching their area of specialization upon entering Canada and are likely to

face issues related to being underpaid, unemployed, or underemployed (Berger, 2004; Chen, 2008). In terms of economic loss, it has been estimated that skill discounting accounts for a total loss of annual immigrant earnings between 2.4 billion CAD (Reitz, 2001) and 3.2 billion CAD (Bloom & Grant, 2001). Therefore, devaluation of human capital is not merely an issue related to the adverse psychological impact it has on immigrants, but it also does a disservice to the Canadian labour market, which forfeits the very goal of immigration policies that are meant to foster a stronger economy.

**Language issues.** Language-related issues pose another barrier to employment for immigrants (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2004). An important predictor for successful economic and social integration is the ability to speak the official language of a country (Tolley, 2003). In Canada, there are two official languages—English and French. Therefore, immigrants who come to Canada without certain fluency in either official language may find it challenging to navigate their day-to-day life as a newcomer, whether it is buying groceries, going to the bank, or for more crucial processes related to their settlement such as obtaining their health cards, driver’s license, and social insurance number. Due to language proficiency issues, immigrants are often misunderstood and inconvenienced in their interaction with others, leading to feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem (Chen, 2006). Regardless of their professional competence, lack of language fluency also prevents them from transferring their technical skills to the world of work (Chen, 2008). In some studies, despite being fluent in English, immigrant women were found to face discrimination by prospective employees due to their accented English (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2005). This is further complicated by the fact that language instruction tends to be geared more towards developing conversational skills rather than technical skills that are needed for skilled professionals, thereby resulting in employment-related difficulties for immigrants (Blysmá & Yohani, 2014). Therefore, from the perspective of immigrants, language can play a pivotal role in their career adjustment to a new country.

**Lack of social and cultural capital.** Immigrants often arrive to a host country with limited social and cultural capital (Syed, 2008; Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010), tools that assist individuals to navigate their social and cultural environment (Peixoto, 2001; Syed, 2008). As newcomers, immigrants often lack knowledge of the cultural norms of a host country until they have spent sufficient time in their new work environment, thereby making them feel

considerably disadvantaged as they try to make cross-cultural work transitions. Due to cultural differences between home and host countries, immigrants often struggle to comprehend and navigate the conflicts arising in their work-related environment (Chen, 2008). Awareness of social and cultural norms towards career-seeking behaviour includes examples of handshakes or use of business cards (McInnes, 2012) along with tips on how to excel in job interviews and resume writing (Hiebert, 2008), each of which seem to play an important role in the world-of-work culture. Similarly, networks are an important consideration for immigrants (Lee, 2005), where a lack of social connections is found to negatively impact their employment outcomes and return on investment of education (Friedman & Krackhardt, 1997). Immigrants themselves have reported a loss of social and professional networks upon immigration (Schellenberg & Maheaux, 2007), which are often considered valuable resources in securing career-related information and job opportunities. Moreover, specific individuals within these networks may act as references, attesting to the skills and credentials of newcomers who are trying to counteract the negative effects of skill discounting. In sum, a lack of social and cultural capital may work against immigrants’ career-building efforts.

**Racism and discrimination.** Issues related to racism and discrimination present yet another challenge in immigrants’ career transition. There is evidence to show that generally speaking, Canadians prefer individuals of European descent over those of non-European descent, which may potentially give rise to discrimination in employment (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Esses & Gardiner, 1996; Parkin & Mendelsohn, 2003). According to some studies, immigrants’ adjustment to Canada to a large extent is influenced by the attitudes of the host country, especially perceptions related to viewing immigrants as a potential threat while vying for limited jobs (Lee & Westwood, 1996; Palmer, 1996). In an extensive discussion on career guidance with immigrants, Chen (2008) observes that some people in the host country are opposed to the practice of immigration and harbour negative attitudes towards immigrants, who are perceived to be causing social unrest in the host country. Such negative views may lead these individuals to be “intentionally or unintentionally inclined to their discriminatory prejudice in their interactions with new immigrants in the workplace and other related vocational life circumstances such as practices and opportunities in regard to hiring, earnings, training, and promotions” (Chen, 2008, p. 428). Other related studies include focusing on negative stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes against immigrants by people of the host country (Reitz, 2005) and hiring practices that are

biased towards immigrants due to language and cultural differences (Purkiss, Perrewe, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006). All these studies suggest that racist attitudes and discrimination (real and perceived) may have significant implications for immigrants' career transitions from home to host country.

**Gender differences.** Issues related to employment are more acute for women immigrants, who face poorer employment outcomes than male immigrants (Dominguez & Hombrados, 2006; Wong & Hirschman, 1983). According to results from the Labour Force Survey conducted between 2006 and 2010, immigrant women, particularly those who arrived to Canada between 5 to 10 years ago, faced a higher unemployment rate than both immigrant men and Canadian-born women (Statistics Canada, 2013). Women are found to suffer from a trifold disadvantage related to gender, immigration status, and race (Adsera & Chiswick, 2007; Antecol, Cobb-Clark, & Trejo, 2003; Wittebrood & Robertson, 1991). Examples of the challenges related to this trifold disadvantage include traditional gender roles with regard to childcare responsibilities, particularly in the absence of a social support system (Cooke, 2001; Ho, 2006; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006), gender and racial discrimination at work resulting in pay inequity and workplace harassment (Barnum, Liden, & Ditomaso, 1995; Beale, 1970; Berdahl & Moore, 2006), and cultural norms regarding domestic work resulting in women working a second shift at home (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

According to some facts in a report submitted on *Immigrant Women: Employment Facts* by ACTEW (2007), three out of five women upon arrival in Canada work in an occupation different from their field. Like men, immigrant women face language barriers and transferability of their foreign credentials as the foremost challenges to their employment. The report also stated that lack of childcare facilities is a barrier for women trying to access employment and training opportunities, especially for immigrant women employed in seasonal, irregular, and shift-work positions. Moreover, as noted earlier, women tend to prioritize family success over personal success regardless of their professional background (Branden, 2014; Iredale, 2005). This seems consistent with research that has found women to make career decisions in a relational context (Crozier, 1999), implying that they tend to make career-related decisions in consideration of others, such as their children or partners. Although recent scholars have advanced a relational theory of working (Blustein, 2011) that highlights the centrality of relationships in decisions, experiences, and interactions in a work-related environment for all individuals (Flum, 2001;

Gergen, 2009), researchers for a long time have stressed the relevance of relationships in women’s career decision-making and CID (Hackett, 1997). Studies in this area suggest that women tend to make occupational choices in view of managing multiple life roles and family expectations (Davey, 1998; Eccles, 1987; Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992). Combined with the general migration effects related to skill discounting and loss of networks, these women may find themselves apparently more disadvantaged than men in advancing their careers.

**Entry status.** There are studies showing that skilled dependent applicants often leave flourishing careers behind and have the required skills and aspirations to integrate into the workforce upon immigration (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Purkayastha, 2005). These studies defined “skilled” spouses as having a minimum of a 4-year college degree. Results from the National Household Survey, conducted by Statistics Canada (2011), found that the percentage of dependent women having a bachelor’s degree or higher under the economic class of immigrants was highest (59%) as compared to their counterparts under the family or refugee class. Consequently, it may be expected that dependent spouses of principal applicants show promise of contributing to Canada’s economy based on the positive correlation established between education and earnings (Blaug, 1972; Card, 1999); however, such is not always the case.

Immigration laws and regulations such as those in Canada and the United States on the surface “appear to be gender neutral,” yet they have “specific implications on the ease of entry and entry status for women and men” (Boyd, 2006, p. 2) as well as for subsequent employment outcomes upon immigration. For instance, one of the criterion of admissibility for economic migrants to Canada takes into account the years of employment history without acknowledging the possibility of women’s absence from the workforce due to caregiving and family responsibilities. This may result in a gap in women’s resumes, which in turn may adversely affect a woman’s reintegration into the labour market after caregiving issues are resolved. Therefore, even though immigrants mostly arrive to Canada as a family (Banerjee & Phan, 2015), the way a man and a woman experience immigration will be very different (Iredale, 2005; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006).

Immigration experiences may in part relate to the visa status with which immigrants enter Canada. As stated previously, the majority of dependent applicants under the economic class of immigrants coming to Canada are women (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013). This dependent status adds yet another dimension to the trifold disadvantage that women face in their

attempts to establish a career upon migration. Focusing specifically on poor employment outcomes associated with immigrant women’s dependent status, Banerjee and Phan (2015) offer two theoretical frameworks that can be particularly useful: first, the human capital approach (Mincer, 1978; Sandell, 1977) and its extended version known as the family investment hypothesis (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2009; Worswick, 1999) and second, gender role theory. According to the *human capital approach* and/or family investment hypothesis, migratory decisions are made in order to maximize the economic advantage of the family as a unit, by investing fully in the career prospects of the member designated as the primary income earner. These decisions include deciding whom to designate as the principal versus dependent applicant on the basis of which migrating partner has higher human capital; in most cases, husbands were assigned as the principal applicant, especially in traditional families (Banerjee & Phan, 2015). As a result, there is a tradeoff for the dependent applicant’s potential economic gain in favour of the total monetary gain for the family (Mincer, 1978).

According to the *gender role theory*, women are expected to take on more household and childcare related responsibilities as compared to their husbands. Although these gendered roles exist even within non-immigrant population, their effects are more pronounced in the case of immigrant women (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Suto, 2009), particularly in the absence of a support network in receiving countries (Cooke, 2001; Ho, 2006; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006; Purkayastha, 2005). The result is that oftentimes women who arrive as dependent applicants, end up settling for part-time and low pressure employment due to acknowledging their inability to pursue full-time career options while attending to domestic responsibilities (Purkayastha, 2005; Shah, 1998). Moreover, since achieving financial stability is a primary concern for most migrating families, women often take up what is known as “survival” jobs—typically described as low paying and low skilled jobs temporarily taken to cover costs related to unemployment. There is evidence to suggest that most immigrant women take up survival jobs at some point during their post-migration settlement (Graham & Thurston, 2005; McCoy & Masuch, 2007), while their husbands are engaged in educational, retraining, and career-related pursuits.

Dependent applicants have largely remained an invisible group within immigrant and career literature. However, a lot of insights may be gained from delving into the literature on expatriate transfers to understand some of the repercussions that dependent migrants face upon disruption of careers. There has been a continued interest in the accompanying spouses of

international transferees, referred to as trailing spouses, within business and human resources literature. These studies are mostly in relation to expatriates’ work performance (Thomas & Lazarova, 2006) and the role of organizational support in their adjustment (McNulty, 2012). According to Banerjee and Phan (2015), some of the issues surrounding expatriate spouses overlap with those of dependent applicant immigrants since “trailing spouses often sacrifice their own professional aspirations to take on a domestic role to which they may not be accustomed and experience cultural isolation leading to strains within the family” (p. 336).

Like dependent immigrants, a lot of trailing spouses in the expatriate community leave their careers behind upon transfers and experience discontinuity, which in turn results in a likely devaluation of their human capital and its adverse impact on their future career prospects (Braseby, 2010). Based on the results of two surveys conducted in the last decade, more than 50% of expatriate spouses were employed in their home countries, but only about 20% were able to find employment in the host country (GMAC, 2008; ORC Worldwide, 2005). Research further suggests that unresolved dual-career issues negatively impact the overall adjustment of trailing spouses in a foreign land (Cole, 2011; Harvey, 1997). Brown’s (2008) study showed that interruption or abandonment of career for a trailing spouse results in feelings of loss of power, identity, and self-worth, which in turn may have a rippling effect on other family members. Given the abrupt break in careers for immigrants in general, what might be aspects that facilitate career-building efforts upon migration? I discuss some of these positive aspects to immigrants’ employment in the next section.

### **Facilitators to Immigrants’ Employment**

The literature has largely focused on the challenges that immigrants face during their career-building efforts in a host country (Alexander, Burleton, & Fong, 2015; Elez, 2014; Premji, Shakya, Spasevski, Merolli, & Athar, 2014). Likewise there is a paucity of recent research that highlights factors that may facilitate immigrants in their career transition (Vojdanijahromi, 2016). For instance, in studies conducted on identifying hindering and helpful factors amongst Iranian immigrants (Vojdanijahromi, 2016), Chinese immigrants (Amundson, Yeung, Sun, Chan, & Cheng, 2011; Zheng, 2010), and on educated women immigrants (Koert, Borgen, & Amundson, 2011), attitude emerged as the most endorsed category of helpful factors for a successful career transition. A positive outlook, persistence, and flexibility were some of the notable traits included in this category. Some other helpful categories identified in these studies

was presence of supportive family and friends, networking, and utilization of government/community resources.

In addition to these studies, there is another source of information that points to the conditions that enhance employment outcomes for skilled immigrants due to efforts made by employers (Sakamoto, Chin, & Young, 2010). In their federally funded project exploring the importance of “Canadian Experience,” Sakamoto et al. (2010) found that immigrants’ experiences of mentorship, volunteering, and co-op programs had a favourable effect on immigrant’s employability. Using a constructivist grounded approach, the researchers explored the notion of Canadian Experience by conducting semi-structured interviews with skilled immigrants, their service providers, and mentors. Findings suggest that each of these career-enhancing experiences provide immigrants with ample opportunities to acquire “tacit knowledge” which are viewed as more critical than acquiring Canadian experience. Tacit knowledge refers to the soft skills required to understand and navigate the norms of a cultural workplace, whereas Canadian experience usually implies having technical skills and expertise in a chosen field.

In order to have a better understanding of career-related issues of immigrants upon arrival in the host country, it is essential to include research on both the hindering and facilitative factors. Although Elez (2014) acknowledges the importance of addressing barriers to successful career integration of immigrants, she warns that “viewing this group only through the lens of challenge further contributes to stereotyping and discrimination” (p. 38). For instance, focusing exclusively on hindering factors might prevent researchers and counsellors from believing that certain factors may account as helpful (Vojdanijahromi, 2016). This was supported by findings from a study where some participants believed that the skills and experience acquired in their home country proved to be assets in their career transition (Amundson et al., 2011). According to the authors of this research, this “finding runs counter to the general assumption that the only worthwhile skills and experience are those that are developed in Canada” (p. 134). Moreover, research on challenges and facilitators to successful career integration of immigrants may provide useful information for developing policies and government initiatives that enable a smoother career transition for immigrants. Such advocacy efforts that account for systemic and contextual factors affecting immigrant women would be consistent with a social justice

perspective that is increasingly promoted within counselling psychology (e.g., Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016).

Lastly, it is worth noting that several government consultations between immigrant-serving organizations, regulators, employers, and other stakeholders have led to recommendations to redress some of the barriers that newcomers face during employment in Canada. Some recommendations include standardizing licensing requirements, assessment, and tracking procedures within regulated professions for newly arrived professionals, and providing accurate and location-based labour market information to immigrants' prior to their arrival to Canada (Employment Challenges of New Canadians, 2015). These government-sanctioned recommendations, among others, show an encouraging trend in assisting immigrants in the host country. The following section reviews the literature on the expectations that immigrants carry when immigrating to a host country and their impact on career-related decisions post-migration.

### **Career-related Aspirations and Expectations**

Most immigrants come with the hopes of affording a better quality of life for themselves and their loved ones. This includes expectations related to enhanced career prospects (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). However several career expectations are challenged due to work-related experiences that immigrants face in the host country (De Silva, 2010). This in part may be due to the career aspirations and expectations that immigrants harbor at the pre-migratory stage. Career aspirations may be regarded as “vocational possibilities or work preferences” under ideal circumstances whereas career expectations represent career choices and pursuits that individuals consider realistic and attainable (Metz, Fouad, & Ilhe-Helledy, 2009, p. 155). In other words, while career aspirations represent what immigrants would like to achieve, career expectations represent what they actually think they would achieve (Smith, 1983).

Immigrants who have held respectable and well-paying jobs in their home country often migrate with expectations of finding similar if not higher levels of employment. However, such expectations are often found to be unrealistic (Lee & Westwood, 1996). This is partly due to the fact that newcomers are often led to believe that their professional credentials will be recognized in the host country (Khan & Watson, 2005; Neault, 2005; Zheng, 2010). Results from a survey found that newcomers to Canada experienced frustration at the lack of accurate and up-to-date pre-arrival information related to employment; as a result, they felt ill-prepared to meet the challenges of economic integration upon coming to Canada (Allies, 2015). These findings point

to the inconsistency between career aspiration/expectation and actual experience post-migration. In a study on Jewish immigrants, participants reported a loss of educational and occupational identity upon migration to Canada (Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009). This led them to question their decision to immigrate to Canada, and experience an overall sense of inadequacy, loss of skills, ability, and self-worth.

In another study on the immigrant experiences of Pakistani women, Khan and Watson (2005) proposed a four-stage model to identify the process of adjustment during their resettlement. The model sought to shed light on the goals and expectations of participants and the loss and hardships they experienced along the way. The four stages included *Seeking a Better Future*, *Confronting Reality*, *Grieving and Mourning*, and *Adjusting*. Although pre-migration these women held high expectations, which included increased quality of life for themselves and their loved ones, post-migration they experienced losses related to prosperity, good life, and occupational status. This discrepancy between pre-migration expectations and post-migration experiences, according to Khan and Watson (2005), resulted in a period of grieving marked by feelings of anger, disappointment, frustration, and dissatisfaction with their lives. Following the mourning period, participants engaged in various coping strategies such as post-migration education, and turning to their religion and social network for invaluable support among other strategies.

Discrepancies in pre-migratory occupational aspirations/expectations and post-migration experiences may also result in a process of compromise with respect to how career choices are made, as suggested by Gottfredson's (1981, 1996) Theory of Circumscription and Compromise. Compromise occurs when individuals quit pursuing desirable career goals based on their perception of incompatibility with the occupation due to external factors (such as educational and employment opportunities) or internal factors (such as self-concept consisting of gender, values, and so on), and whether the occupation is realistically obtainable. A similar process of compromise can occur for immigrants, whereby they make career decisions post-migration, such as switching their area of expertise or accepting positions they previously considered unacceptable based on their skill level and training (Chen, 2008). Therefore, inconsistencies between expectations and actual experiences may result in “frustration, alienation from a familiar working environment, erosion of skills, and ultimate loss of human potential to the Canadian economy” (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health, 1988, p. 30). Unmet expectations may lead

many immigrants to adjust their career aspirations upon migration by engaging in a variety of career decisions post-migration, as discussed next.

### **Career Decision-Making and the Role of Human Agency Post-Migration**

It is difficult to talk about career decision-making in a migratory context without addressing the role of human agency (Adamuti-Trache, 2011). According to Adamuti-Trache (2011), individuals exercise agency to “make choices and adopt strategies” over a lifetime in order to deal “with structural and institutional barriers” (p. 65). Theories such as Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002) refer to human agency as an array of self-regulatory and self-awareness processes that enable an individual to exert control over a life-career destination to achieve desirable outcomes. In other words, human agency is the act of combining human intention and action to effect positive changes in a person’s life and career (Chen, 2006; Cochran, 1990, 1997). Indeed, immigrant women have been found to overcome their unique challenges related to career transition by relying on their inner strength and coping resources (Koert et al. 2011; Remennick, 2005; Salaff & Greve, 2004). Studies have highlighted the role of flexibility, perseverance, sense of agency, and effective utilization of support networks in immigrant women’s career-building efforts in host country. According to Chen (2008), promoting agency can be a key component in career counselling with immigrants to help them improve their life-career outcomes.

In the previous sections I characterized career-related expectations and issues immigrants may experience in a Canadian context, building the case that these have implications for the CID of immigrant women. In the sections that follow, I turn our attention to the construct of career identity and its development, specifically in relation to immigrants. I end with specific attention to constructivist approaches to CID that frame the study.

### **Identity and Self-Concept in a Career Context**

Identity and self-concept have been at the heart of earlier career development theories and research. However, given the interconnectedness of identity and self-concept, there have been challenges to differentiating the two constructs (Heine & Lehman, 2004; Ullman & Tatar, 2001). According to Savickas (2002), self-concept is a “picture of the self in some role, situation, or position, performing some set of functions, or in some web of relationships” (p. 163). Applying the notion of self-concept in his developmental framework, Super (1981) focused a large part of his Life-Span/Life-Space Theory on how self-concept is implemented in vocational

behaviour while performing multiple roles over a life-span. Similarly, self-concept is central to career selection in Gottfredson's (1981, 1986) Theory of Circumscription and Compromise, where people make occupational choices consistent with their self-image. In her subsequent work on the role of self-concept in vocational theory, Gottfredson (1985) argued that self-concept comprises two major components: identity and self-esteem, where identity refers to the content of one's perceptions of self, and self-esteem refers to the evaluative component of how an individual feels about himself/herself. In this sense, identity is embedded within the self-concept and implies plurality. In fact, Stryker (1979) proposed a “salience hierarchy” in which he suggested that individuals are not equally invested in all their identities at the same time and may have preferred identities, a sentiment echoed by Gottfredson (1985). Therefore, while self-concept is a broad term, identity can be understood as a subset of self-concept and assume different meanings under varying personal, social, and work-related contexts.

Several types of work-related identities have surfaced in the vocational literature, most notably professional identity, vocational identity, and career identity. Each carry specific connotations and merit distinctive consideration, which shall be discussed in the following section.

### **Types of Work-Related Identities**

Hogg and Terry (2001) stressed the importance of work-related identities to a person's sense of self over personal traits such as gender, race, or ethnicity. Amongst the different types of work-related identities, *professional identity* seems to be the most widely researched. It is defined as a relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences with regard to how people define themselves in a professional role (Schein, 1978). According to Ibarra (1999), individuals engage in a process of experimenting with several images called the “provisional selves” that lay the basis for potential, yet not fully developed, professional identities. Thus, there is always a referent group and/or a specific profession against which professional identity is created and validated. Like professional identity, there are several studies in the literature that exist with regard to *vocational identity* (Gushue, Scanler, Pantzer, & Clarke, 2006; Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess, 2002). Vocational identity was greatly used by Holland (1997) in his trait and factor approach, where he defined vocational identity as “the possession of a clear and stable picture of one's goals, interests, and talents” (p. 5). He argued that these characteristics boost one's confidence in the ability to make effective career decisions,

and refers to the degree to which a workplace offers clarity and integration of goals, tasks, and rewards. According to Holland (1997), differentiated individuals have a highly crystallized vocational identity, and display greater competence and satisfaction related to career and educational endeavours. This suggests unidirectionality when referring to vocational identity where, once established, it will stabilize and get more differentiated over time.

According to Meijers (1998), *career identity* refers to a “structure of meanings in which the individual links his [sic] own motivation, interests and competencies with acceptable career roles” (p. 191). Meijers (1998) further states that as individuals are constantly exposed to new life experiences, structure is brought about by achieving balance between cognition, will, and emotion by revising old meanings for potentially new ones in a work-related environment. This is an important distinction from professional identity, as career identity does not have a specific group with which one’s professional self is comparable, but entails a rather generalized perception of one’s career-related potential and interests in terms of acceptable roles.

Similarly, in contrast to vocational identity, the concept of career identity is dynamic and its development is an ongoing process, which adds the dimension of temporality. This is supported by the fact that career identity, by nature, is longitudinal and entails making sense of one’s past and present, and giving direction to one’s future (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). This is also keeping in mind that the significance attached to one’s past, present, and future tends to change over the course of one’s life (Plunkett, 2001). Therefore, according to Meijers (1998), career identity is not merely an accumulation of one’s career-related experiences, but rather integration of these events into meaningful structures. Further, due to its dynamic nature, career identities are sensitive to changes in the work-related environment which can occur during transitions across organizations, life stages, or borders as in the case of migration from one country to another. In each of these scenarios, the person has to adapt to the demands of a completely changed work culture and occupational standard that may or may not feel consistent with his or her current career identity. Therefore, as is the case with professional identity, this may necessitate individuals to critically reevaluate their attitudes and perceptions regarding their role in a potential career by testing old identities and experimenting with new ones while navigating these transitions (Ibarra, 1999).

Several studies have been conducted with respect to professional identity of immigrants (Cardu, 2007; Remennick, 2013; Shuval, 2010) and vocational identity of immigrants (Coutinho,

2010; LeBlanc, 2002), but career identity is relatively less understood and under-researched. One factor contributing to the invisibility of this construct from the literature is the fact that very often these terms have been used interchangeably, even though they imply different meanings. The following section will discuss how a fairly enduring concept of one’s identity, that is, career identity develops over time.

### **Development of Career Identity**

With the understanding that identity is a fluid and context-dependent construct, Amundson’s (1994) concept of “identity negotiation” may be useful to understand people undergoing life-career transitions (Chen, 1998), as may be the case with immigrants. Originally developed as a theoretical framework to understand the transition period during unemployment, Amundson (1994) stated that “identity negotiation is an ongoing process throughout life but becomes particularly significant during times of transition when boundaries are fluid” (p. 99). Variables at the interpersonal, organizational, socio-economic, and environmental level combine together to define and redefine one’s identity during the transition process. A similar situation may apply to immigrants; when faced with a new work environment, they begin to renegotiate their career identities to feel consistent with their altered environment. Due to this dynamic nature of identity, immigrants oftentimes have to surrender previously held identities in their home culture in order to accommodate the demands of the host culture (Orr, Mana, & Mana, 2003; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Sayegh & Jean-Claude, 1993). Consequently, this process not only includes the construction of a new identity, but also deconstructing parts of an identity that may no longer feel relevant. Therefore, immigrants may likely begin to construct self-narratives to justify the changes that take place in their work-related activities and social networks (Ibarra, 2003).

### **Constructive Approaches to Career Identity Development**

Career identity offers a flexible basis for identity construction (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), unlike other types of work-related identities which are bound by context and roles. This nonlinear nature of CID is consistent with the conceptual framework offered by constructivist approaches. According to the constructivist perspective, identity formation is viewed as a life-long process where it is restructured and revised in response to self-relevant life experiences (Berzonsky, 1989). Narrative approaches such as Career Construction Theory hinges on concepts such as identity, adaptability, intentionality, narratibility to comprehend vocational

behaviour (Savickas, 2005). A new paradigm called “life designing” focuses on contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, nonlinear progression, multiple perspectives, and personal patterns (Savickas et al., 2009). Although developed primarily as a paradigm for career intervention, terms such as *construction* and *reconstruction* of identities feature fairly prominently in the career construction approach to explain how people develop identity narratives to “adopt a culturally meaningful script and then pursue it in work roles that matter to them and their communities” (Savickas, 2012, p. 15). However, identities are shaped by the context which necessitates individuals to continuously revise their identities to accommodate significant experiences into their ongoing life theme. According to Heinz (2002), when an individual faces challenging situations, revising an identity becomes inevitable as the content of the current identity is unable to support the new demands. Some constructivist studies have also defined career identity “as a practice of articulating, performing and negotiating identity positions in narrating career experiences” (LaPointe, 2010, p. 4). LaPointe’s (2010) approach allows for the role of agency, where individuals are capable of negotiating their identity positions, thereby influencing their careers differently. A constructivist approach also corresponds well to the more inclusive conceptualization of the term “career” (Barbera, 2013) as used in this study. In view of the constructivist perspective, Patton and McMahon (2006) state “careers do not exist in the objective sense that jobs or occupations do, rather they are created by individuals” (p. 5).

### **Rationale of the Study**

Based on the foregoing review of literature, it is evident that immigrants, particularly economic migrants, represent a group of highly skilled and qualified individuals who come to Canada with expectations of integrating into the labour force. However, immigrants are often compelled to make career decisions upon migration that vary in terms of alignment with those expectations and pre-migration qualifications given various supports and barriers they may encounter. While there is evidence that a large proportion of immigrants struggle with career transitions (Remennick, 2007; Yakushko, 2006), how these transitions are negotiated and shape CID, as differentiated from other types of work-related identities, remain relatively under-researched, especially with regard to facilitative aspects. This may be particularly important given the potential cumulative disadvantage immigrant women face in their attempts to achieve their career goals.

Moreover, immigrant literature is dominated with quantitative studies in understanding the career development of immigrants, by either analyzing longitudinal sets of data or census data to provide demographic statistics and characterize immigration issues. Although quantitative methods have been useful in ascertaining how representative participant responses are, and for issues related to career adjustment of immigrants through descriptive statistics, they fall short on the advantages provided by qualitative procedures in terms of capturing the “richness of responses and in mapping out the range of experiences” (Eggerth, DeLaney, Flynn, & Jacobson, 2012, p. 11). In an extensive literature review published by Ahonen, Benavides, and Benach (2007) on immigrant populations, work, and health, articles citing quantitative methods outnumbered qualitative methods by a ratio of 4:1. This speaks to the necessity of incorporating more qualitative studies to gain a holistic understanding of immigration issues. Although there has been a growing trend in the past few decades to apply qualitative procedures and mixed methods to the study of immigration issues, which have indeed been useful in tapping the nuances and subtleties associated with immigration experience, very few, if any, qualitative studies exist to study the phenomenon in question, that is CID. The purpose of the present study was to use a qualitative approach to better understand the process of CID among women immigrants arriving as dependents under the economic class.

### **Research Questions**

To elucidate experiences of CID as a process, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do *pre-migratory* and *post-migratory* decisions affect CID of immigrant women on a dependent visa?
2. How do *perceived facilitators* and *perceived barriers* impact immigrant women’s CID?
3. How do immigrant women’s *aspirations* and *expectations*, as they relate to their CID, compare to what actually unfolds?

Results from the study were expected to contribute to the scarce literature available on dependent immigrants and their developing career identity upon migration. Findings from this research were also expected to shed light on some of the challenges associated with being a woman immigrant and may provide useful information to career counsellors who play a critical role in helping immigrants navigate through career transitions in a new country.

### CHAPTER III: Methods

The present study was a qualitative inquiry inspired by a grounded theory approach to explore career identity development (CID) of immigrant women arriving to Canada as dependent applicants. A grounded theory inspired approach allowed for the generation of themes, subthemes and possible connections between these themes with respect to immigrant women’s CID.

#### **Constructivist Approach**

Considering that immigrants hail from varied cultural backgrounds and come to a vastly different setting upon immigration, their contextual and social processes will be of significance in their new environment. This alludes to the subjective and unique set of experiences every immigrant goes through during cross-cultural transitions. Referred to as *constructivism*, this approach is based on the premise that individuals create knowledge and subjective representations of their experiences (Fosnot, 1996) by constructing their own reality, rather than passively submitting to the environment (Wilber, 1989). Constructive approaches are a departure from the earlier positivist models that defined career progression in linear terms and too narrowly by incorporating the dynamic realities of individuals operating in a fast-paced environment (Reid, 2006). As a result, there is an increasing trend in adopting a constructivist lens when conducting career research (Guindon & Richmond, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Parrish, 2008). In keeping with these constructivist principles, a qualitative inquiry was considered suitable for the purpose of the study.

#### **A Qualitative Inquiry**

A qualitative study will be useful in obtaining an in-depth and detailed perspective from immigrants regarding some of the hindering and facilitating experiences they have gone through in their efforts to establish a career. It is well-established that qualitative methods are useful when little is understood about a particular phenomenon (Morse & Field, 1995), especially when describing the phenomena from an *emic*, or participant’s, perspective (Cutcliffe, Stevenson, Jackson, & Smith, 2006). Moreover, qualitative research involves an inductive approach where data help create a conceptual framework to explain a given phenomenon. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, no conceptual framework exists to explain CID of women immigrants

and therefore a qualitative lens using a grounded theory inspired approach was deemed appropriate.

### **Rationale for Using a Grounded Theory Inspired Approach**

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the goals of qualitative research can range from “description, to conceptual ordering, to theorizing” (p. 53). The goal of the proposed study is not theory building but rather conceptual ordering which refers to “the organization of data into discrete categories...according to their properties and dimensions, then the utilization of description to elucidate those categories”(p. 54). A grounded theory inspired approach is consistent with the purpose of the present study where process oriented answers were being sought (Creswell, Hanson, Piano, & Morales, 2007) in terms of *how* women with dependent status develop career identity upon immigration. The aim of a grounded theory approach is to move beyond description and create a theory or a “unified theoretical explanation” (Corbin & Strauss, 2007, p. 107) for a process or an action, grounded in data from individuals who have undergone the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, a full grounded theory operates on the principle of *theoretical saturation*, whereby a theory is developed until no new data appear during sampling and analysis procedures (Morse, 2004). Theory building is a complex activity and requires a detailed explanation of how well-saturated categories are interconnected and form a theory that explain a particular phenomenon (Hage, 1972). Owing to the complexity, Corbin and Strauss (2008) warned researchers who plan on constructing a theory of the need to “do it well and not settle for some poorly constructed, thin imitation of theory. The construction of theory necessitates that an idea be explored fully and considered from many different angles or perspectives” (p. 56). Therefore, rather than formulating a theory, the study sought to identify key themes related to immigrant women’s CID and possible interactions between key themes. These themes could lay the basis for future research geared to developing a substantial theory related to CID among immigrant women.

In line with the constructivist philosophy, I applied Charmaz’s (2003, 2006) variant of grounded theory, which is critical of the “objectivist” stance of classic grounded theory. According to Charmaz (2014), the classic grounded theory relies on the voice of a neutral observer and value-free researcher while assuming the existence of an objective external reality. On the other hand, Charmaz’s (2014) constructivist version of grounded theory starts with the assumption that “social reality is multiple, processual, and constructed” (p. 13), thereby

advocating for the creation of a shared reality between researcher and participant. This would further imply the possibility of the researcher’s pre-understandings of the phenomenon in question entering the interpretation of data. The current study is guided by Charmaz’s interpretive perspective on grounded theory. Providing a conceptual framework for the phenomenon prior to investigation runs counter to the core of grounded theory philosophy—of allowing conceptualizations to flow from the data. Moreover, adherence to a conceptual framework may influence the interpretation of data which is alleged to emerge from a grounded theory based analysis. For these reasons, no such framework was provided for the purpose of this study.

As an immigrant to two countries (USA and Canada) on a dependent visa, I am familiar with the phenomenon under study and acutely aware of how my career identity meandered these past several years. Consequently, for the present study, I adopted the position of an “acknowledged participant” instead of the “all knowing analyst” (Clarke, 2005, pp. xxvii, xxviii). This entailed having the awareness that I would not be able to objectively analyze data, solely from the participant’s viewpoint without my own biases creeping into the interpretation of data. To this end, my preunderstandings of the phenomenon under study are made available to the readers (Appendix A).

### **Method for Thematic Analysis**

According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), thematic coding is a process fundamental to several analytic traditions, such as grounded theory. In instances where the researcher cannot adhere to the implicit theoretical commitments of a full-fledged grounded theory, thematic analysis could be used as the procedures are akin to a grounded theory approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke’s (2012) six-phase method of analysis was used for conducting thematic analysis of the data obtained from each participant’s interview. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a systematic method for “identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meanings (themes) across a data set” (p. 57). By focusing on patterns across a data set, thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify themes that are collectively shared among participants in relation to the research questions pursued. Due to the anticipated timeline of the current study, grounded theory inspired approach was seen as befitting to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of CID among immigrant women, while still adhering to systematic data collection and analysis procedures of grounded theory.

An inductive, or data-driven, approach to coding and analyzing data was followed to develop themes related to CID. The underlying assumption is that the themes can be mapped back closely to the content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Further, the research question in this study was experiential and exploratory as it foregrounded the voice of the participants and aimed to identify themes related to CID based on their experiences. It was assumed that truth is accessible through language but the narrative accounts are socially mediated (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). In that sense, there were no a priori theoretical concepts or discourse that helped code, analyze, and interpret the data. Therefore, inductive analysis of data also refers to the process of coding data without having to fit it within a “researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

### **Participants**

Female spouses of principal applicants, under the economic class of immigrants, also known as dependent applicants, were considered for the study. Previous studies have identified dependent applicants as “skilled” if they minimally complete four years toward a college degree within their home country (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Purkayastha, 2005), suggesting applicants possess career aspirations and promise of economic integration. As I wanted to explore the CID of immigrant women on a promising career path, I laid out the following inclusion criteria for study participation: (a) immigrants who identify themselves as women and who are 18 years old and above; (b) must have arrived to Canada at least one year prior to the study; (c) must have arrived as a dependent applicant under the economic class of immigrants; and (d) must have at least four years of college education or a diploma in their home country. Possessing a diploma was deemed a suitable criterion as an indication of intent to pursue a career and based on a positive correlation established between education and earnings (Blaug, 1972; Card, 1999). Participants who were unable to communicate in English or who had any mental health issues that could preclude them from participating in interviews safely and fully were excluded from the study. Lastly, efforts were made to have a heterogeneous sample by considering participants who immigrated to Canada from different countries, as well as those who had spent varying lengths of time in Canada, in order to explore CID of immigrant women over time.

According to Patton (2002), “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244) and sample size will depend on several criteria including the purpose of the proposed study, usefulness and credibility of data, and availability of resources to the researcher (Patton, 1990,

2002). In order to generate a substantive theory with regard to a process, the classic grounded theory approach operates on the principle of *saturation*, which involves gathering data until no new information arises from the participants. However, in view of the purpose of the study of focusing themes related to CID, I intended to recruit 6-8 participants. Eventually, 6 participants were recruited. The expectation was that the stated number of participants would provide sufficient data to identify major themes underlying CID and begin to unveil possible connections between them. This is consistent with Morrow's (2005) recommendation which states that “although not a formal methodological rule, the situational diversity necessary for identifying thematic patterns is often provided by three to five interview transcripts” (p. 255).

### **Instruments Used**

A combination of sources were used to collect data for the present study. While a semi-structured interview protocol was used to gather detailed and rich accounts of participants' career-related experiences, the demographic questionnaire was useful in obtaining contextual information and situating the participant's experiences related to their career journey upon immigration.

**Demographic questionnaire.** I sought demographic information (Appendix B) from participants regarding their age, marital status, number of children (if applicable), country of origin, educational background, number of years in Canada, employment history in home and host countries, current employment status, and so on. This information provided background information and a better understanding of the participant, such as their stage of life and duration of time spent in Canada, which could have a bearing on CID.

**Interview protocol.** A semi-structured interview approach was chosen because of its flexible framework. It allowed participants to bring up information on their own terms without being confined to a fixed sequence of questions (Aijawi & Higgs, 2007). An interview protocol (Appendix C) with open-ended questions related to CID was developed for use with each participant. Questions were framed with the purpose of gathering information on how pre-migratory decisions were made (e.g., “Can you tell me how the decision for you and your family to migrate to Canada was made?”; “What was the basis of deciding who the principal/dependent applicant would be between you and your partner?”), career aspirations and expectations pre-and post-migration (e.g., “What did you aspire for in terms of having a career in Canada?”; “To what extent were your expectations met?”), perceived challenges and facilitators in pursuing a career

in Canada (e.g., “How would you describe your journey to establish yourself career-wise in Canada?”; “Can you share specific instances of any facilitating or challenging experiences, including any turning points in your career journey?”), and lastly their understanding of their current career identity (e.g., “How would you describe your current career identity?”). The interview was loosely structured, with the possibility of questions being added for subsequent interviews, as may be necessary for the constant comparison method, a distinguishing feature of a grounded theory approach. Constant comparison is a process where, if information obtained during a participant interview was found to be relevant to CID yet missing from the interview protocol, a new question or questions could be formulated based on the information and incorporated in subsequent interviews with remaining participants. During the second interview, there was a relational component brought up by the participant as she spoke about her career identity. Believing the relational aspect to be an important one in participants’ career journey, I attempted to explore the role of relationships in subsequent interviews as it might relate to CID.

**Researcher as an instrument.** According to Patton (1990), the credibility of the researcher is of critical importance in a qualitative study because the researcher is both the major instrument of data collection and data analysis. Owing to the researcher’s experience with the phenomenon under study, researcher biases and assumptions will likely have an impact on how the data are received and interpreted through the course of the study. Since I adopted a constructivist grounded theory stance in the study, I fully acknowledged my pre-understandings and presuppositions regarding the phenomenon and make them available to the reader in Appendix A.

## **Procedures**

**Participant recruitment.** Recruitment of participants took place through the months of April to July of 2016, after obtaining ethics approval from University of Ottawa’s Research Ethics Board (Appendix D). Purposive sampling occurred by selecting participants believed to be able to provide an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). It was intended that participants be recruited from various community organizations in Eastern Canada that serve immigrant populations. A letter of permission (Appendix E) was sent out to two organizations to seek permission to recruit women immigrants who use these organizations’ services. After obtaining permission, a study description (Appendix F) stating the nature and purpose of the research, along with the eligibility criteria for study participation was circulated

through (a) posters on the organizations’ message/bulletin board (Appendix G) and (b) emails to members registered on the organization’s mailing list. Those interested in participating in the study were to contact me, at which time I went through the screening checklist for recruitment (Appendix H) to ensure that interested participants met the inclusion criteria.

Since no response was obtained from either organization, snowball sampling was used as an alternative method for data collection. Also known as *chain sampling*, this technique “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell, 2013, p. 158). While one way to recruit participants through this sampling technique is to tap into the social network of participants by means of referral to access a specific population, another way to initiate contacts is the use of a personal network by asking friends and acquaintances to get involved, who in turn ask people if they are interested in participating in the study (Browne, 2005). I used my personal contacts by asking them to refer me to women immigrants they believed would satisfy the inclusion criteria for the study. Participants recruited in this manner were then asked to inform people within their own social networks of the study. Participants were eventually recruited by tapping both into my and the participants’ social networks.

**Participant characteristics.** A total of six immigrant women who had spent varying lengths of time in Canada and emigrating from different countries, participated in the study. Their educational background in their home countries varied from a diploma to a doctoral degree: out of six participants, two participants had a diploma, two had a Bachelor’s degree, one had a Master’s degree and the remaining one participant had a doctoral degree. Their age ranged from 25 years to 50 plus years. Their mean age cannot be established as some participants preferred providing an age range over specifying their exact age. Similarly, a participant declined from providing the exact age of her children, as has been indicated in Table 1 below which summarizes the key demographic information related to each of the participants.

Table 1

*A Summary of Demographic Information of Participants*

Pseudonym	Years in Canada	Age	Country emigrated from	Number of children (age)	<u>Pre-migration</u>		<u>Post-migration</u>	
					Education	Employment (years)	Education	Employment (years)
Yasmin	1.5	25	Bangladesh	NA	Bachelor’s degree (Business Administration)	None	In progress	None
Sarah	6	36	United Kingdom	2 (7, 4)	Diploma (Customer Relationship), Diploma (Beauty & Hairstyling)	Billing analyst (6), Worked at pub (part-time), Hairstylist (5)	None	Freelance hairstylist (5), Cleaning services provider (3), Sales associate (5 months)
Chandi	8	40	Ireland	1 (6)	Doctoral degree (International Relations)	Research assistant-USA (1), Policy analyst and researcher (1)	None	Independent researcher (7-8)
Jamie	12	40+	China	2 (--)	Bachelor’s degree (Accounting)	Accountant – (4-5), Assistant manager (1)	Diploma (Early Childhood Education)	Early childhood educator (5), Activity animator (1), Chef (6 months)
Swati	13	43	India	2 (15, 12)	Master’s degree (English)	Teacher (2), Telemarket associate (7-8 months)	Diploma (Early Childhood Education)	Early childhood educator (1.5),

Aduna	16	50+	France	2 (25, 16)	Diploma (Accounting)	Assistant - boutique (2)  Accountant, (10), Sales associate (8)	Diploma (Early Childhood Education)	Sales associate (3), Home daycare (8) Early childhood educator (1), Montessori school (5), Restaurant business (5)
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**Data collection.** Participants who expressed interest were screened by phone to discern whether they met the eligibility criteria. Once deemed eligible, the researcher’s office space or reserved private rooms in the public library was suggested as the location for holding the interviews to ensure privacy and minimal distraction. A meeting time mutually convenient to both parties was also established. Once meeting face-to-face, I went over the Informed Consent Form (Appendix I) with the participants to ensure they understood the voluntary nature of participation in the study and its potential benefits and risks, and offered opportunity to ask questions prior to signing the form. Thereafter, I went over the demographic questionnaire with participants.

Each participant shared their experiences in a semi-structured interview, which ranged between 35 minutes to 1 hour, 33 minutes. Notes were taken as needed before, during, and immediately after the interviews to track any observations throughout the process (Swickert, 1997). In-vivo member checks were also conducted throughout the interview by often paraphrasing what the participants were saying to gain more understanding of what was being communicated by them. Participants were thanked and debriefed at the end of their interview.

The demographic questionnaire and the interview conducted for each participant were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. Member checks were conducted subsequently at the level of providing transcripts of interviews to participants to give them an opportunity to verify the information they provided during the interview (Shenton, 2004) and ensure data collection was finalized prior to analysis. Transcripts were sent to participants as a password protected file over email. None of the participants responded back with any discrepancy regarding their transcribed interview, which were then used for data analysis.

**Data analysis.** Data analysis for conceptual ordering was carried out using systematic thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2012) to identify themes and subthemes related to the CID of immigrant women. Following Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) definition of conceptual ordering noted earlier, the most meaningful way to order the themes generated was to organize them temporally. Braun and Clarke (2012) propose a six-phase method to conduct thematic analysis as described below.

**Phase 1.** Familiarization with the data: After transcribing the interviews verbatim, the transcripts were read and re-read several times to become familiar with the data and to make initial observations in the form of notes along margins of the transcripts. This phase involved going beyond the surface meaning of what participants said by actively searching for what was being implied.

**Phase 2.** Generation of initial codes: This included the systematic and thorough coding of significant ideas or features of the data. Transcripts were reviewed systematically, line by line, to identify parts of text that appeared meaningful. Inclusivity was key during this phase, searching for as many meaningful units as possible without paying too much attention to what might be useful for later analyses. This was done as it is easier to discard codes that may not provide any coherent meaning to the analyses as compared to having to go through recoding again, even though some amount of recoding is an inevitable part of the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

I coded as many meaningful units as I could identify in the text by providing initial codes in the form of labels or brief summary which described the content of the data for that meaningful unit. These codes were either *descriptive*, sticking close to participant meaning for that particular excerpt or *interpretive*, based on my conceptual understanding of what was being implied. Generation of initial codes helped to identify meaningful units that were appearing repetitively as a pattern across each data item and the entire data set.

This phase can be illustrated with the help of an example. For instance, when a participant mentioned that the first time she started thinking about a career in Canada was when her children started going to school, it was initially coded as “time for self/thinking about career goals.” When the same idea of thinking about a career after children started attending school appeared for a few other participants, it signaled a repetitive pattern.

This phase was carried out by creating a tabular analysis of initial codes for each transcript, such as that represented in Table 2 below based on Chandi’s transcript.

Table 2

*Example of Phase 2: Generation of Initial Codes*

Line Number	Meaningful Unit	Initial Codes
12	<i>I didn’t really spend a lot of time thinking about a career but I knew I wanted to go back</i>	Inclination towards career
16	<i>So this is what I knew I wanted, but in the back of my mind I was just thinking about my options right here in Canada</i>	Pre-migratory aspiration
21	<i>So three years ago in Carleton but I needed to have my own money, which I didn’t</i>	Perception of barriers
25	<i>Yes the professor wanted me to...she wanted to be my mentor but this really didn’t work out</i>	Missed opportunity
26	<i>I was really disappointed because I was like oh I am ready actually just to do the postdoc</i>	Aspiration-expectation discrepancy
32-35	<i>Also I found out I was, um, because and that’s more related to being a caregiver than being an immigrant woman but you are penalized sometimes for being at home because from the office in Carleton University, you know the years you are at home are counted as if I did nothing but..</i>	Devaluation of caregiver role
41-42	<i>So I found that even like the most human rights you know where universities of human rights that you can also be discriminated against because you have been a caregiver</i>	HR violation
47	<i>From the time he was 3, I had a couple of hours to myself and that’s when I went back to my research</i>	Time for self

**Phase 3.** Identification of themes and subthemes: According to Braun and Clarke (2012), in this phase, the researcher is actively looking for overlap between initial codes and later identifying a broader issue around which these codes cluster in order to provide a coherent and meaningful picture of the data. For instance, using the previous example in Phase 2, after a few other participants shared similar accounts of thinking about their career after their children started going to school, it was recognized as a recurrent pattern in a woman’s CID, and therefore a potential cluster was identified as “Increased Focus on Self” as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

*Example of Phase 3: Identification of Cluster Around “Increased Focus on Self”*

Pseudonym	Quote	Code	Cluster
Sarah	<i>I was in a new country alone with a child now. So I never missed a career at that point because I was trying to build a life... And it’s not until now when my children have gone to school that now I think, “Oh I do miss my career” you know. I should go out and find a career and see what I can do... (133-136)</i>	Thinking about career goals	Increased Focus on Self
Chandi	<i>From the time [my son] was 3, I had a couple of hours to myself and that’s when I went back to my research. So now I find that, umm, he is at school full time. He is fine and I can concentrate on myself. (56-61)</i>	Time for self	Increased Focus on Self

At this stage, “relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes (e.g., main overarching themes and sub-themes within them)” are elucidated (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 89-90). For example, three different clusters—“Increased focus on self,” “Disenchantment with short-term career goals,” and “Receiving positive affirmation”—appeared to share a commonality in that they seemed to reflect events or experiences that created a shift in participants’ CID toward taking more decisive actions related to their career. I chose to

name this commonality “Tipping Point,” which became a main theme, and its associated clusters became subthemes reflecting the theme Tipping Point. The resultant subthemes reflect the different circumstances under which Tipping Point occurred for different participants. For some participants, the tipping point happened when they had time to focus on themselves once their children started school; for others, it happened when they seemed disillusioned with the idea of chasing short-term career goals or had received positive affirmations from people that they found encouraging. A similar level of analysis was carried out for each of the main themes to identify subthemes.

*Phase 4.* Reviewing of themes: After themes and subthemes were generated, they were revisited and reviewed thoroughly to ensure coherence within each theme and that the groupings of subthemes formed clear and identifiable categories of information with no overlap. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), this phase is all about “quality checking” (p. 65) by asking questions such as “is this a theme or just a code,” “what is the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the theme,” “is there substantial and meaningful data to support a theme.” Providing answers to these questions helps to eliminate redundancy and enhance the richness of a theme. If required, a broad theme can be split into two specific themes if the information contained relates to distinguishable elements. Likewise two themes can be merged into one if they correspond to seemingly similar aspects.

For instance, two potential themes were generated during Phase 3 in relation to immigrant women’s CID, namely “Finding Parallels” and “Discovering a Calling.” However, on reviewing the extent (boundaries) and depth of each of these potential themes, I came to perceive the internal processes and timing related to both these “themes” as very similar and therefore decided to collapse these two as subthemes under one single main theme labelled “Redirecting One’s Career Path.” Such collapsing precluded having two themes that were too thin in description, and generated two different, yet related aspects of an overarching theme, adding richness to it.

This phase also followed the guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) in determining the “keyness” (p. 82) of a theme, which implied exercising researcher judgment, consistency, and flexibility while considering what makes for a good theme. The authors note that the frequency with which a theme appears does not necessarily make it more important than the ones appearing less frequently within a data set. What is more critical is whether the theme

encapsulates something relevant to the study’s research questions. Therefore, quality is given more precedence over quantity, when making decisions related to the keyness of themes.

**Phase 5.** Defining and labelling themes: After a thorough reviewing of themes, I engaged in a process of refining the themes by ensuring that each theme had a singular focus, was connected to other themes yet did not overlap, and, finally, provided a coherent picture of the data by building on previous themes. I defined a theme by providing a description of what it meant in relation to immigrant women’s CID. Lastly, the themes were labelled in such a way that essential aspects were captured as concisely as possible.

**Phase 6.** Producing the report: This relates to the final outcome of the analysis by collating the themes generated across all participants into a meaningful narrative that speaks to the entire data. This was done by mapping the report back to the research questions and situating the findings within the chosen field of study in the form of a scholarly report, as will be presented under *Results* (Chapter IV) and *Discussion* (Chapter V).

### **Trustworthiness**

The most widely used benchmark of ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These terms are a replacement for similar constructs used in the quantitative tradition, namely internal validity, external validity/generalizability, reliability, and objectivity, respectively. With regard to each of these criteria in qualitative research, I took the following steps to enhance the trustworthiness of this research endeavor.

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to the degree of congruence between study findings and “reality.” In other words, a qualitative study is considered credible when it offers a description or interpretation of a phenomenon under study in a way that resonates with individuals who have experienced that phenomenon and they would recognize the descriptions (Sandelowski, 1986).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research and can be achieved in several ways. In this study, I resorted to member checks, auditing, reflective journaling, and recruitment of willing participants as strategies to achieve credibility.

Shenton (2004) states that in order to verify the accuracy of the data with participants, *member checks* “may take place ‘on the spot’ in the course, and at the end, of the data collection dialogues” (p. 68). I conducted member checks at two levels: first, I did in-vivo member

checking during the interview as a means of verifying any discrepancy while information is being recorded during the interview (Truell, 2001). I achieved this by iterative questioning, continuous paraphrasing, and constant clarification as needed to make sure that I was fully understanding what was being said by the participants. It happened a few times during the course of an interview that I misunderstood what was being said and it was only after reflecting back to participants that I was made aware of the discrepancy. Paraphrasing was useful given the population under study; since English was not the first language for many participants, reflecting back what I was hearing during the interview ensured that little was being lost in communication. Participants often clarified if I misheard or misunderstood them. The other level of member check was conducted at the end of data collection whereby I emailed transcripts of the interview to participants so that they had an opportunity to verify the information they provided. The intention here is to allow participants to consider if their “words match what they actually intended” (Shenton, 2004, p. 68).

The other procedure used for establishing credibility was through *auditing*. My thesis supervisor acted as an external audit to review the soundness of my data collection and analysis procedures. This involved consultations during the initial stages of formulating the study by ensuring that established methods of inquiry were used to investigate the phenomenon as well as challenging my assumptions and interpretation of the data later on. My supervisor reviewed the transcripts, phase 1 and 2 coding, and resultant themes I generated in phase 5, and provided suggestions to look at data in multiple ways that continuously challenged me to find the one that resonated most with my researcher sensibility. Through multiple debriefing sessions, I was made aware of my researcher bias that could potentially undermine the quality of the project, which in turn increased the credibility quotient. For instance, my understanding of the term “dependent” underwent considerable changes, from the point of conceptualizing the study to preparing this report. When I started out, I believed dependent to be a merely legal term, signifying one’s entry status within the Canadian immigration system. It was only during and after participant interviews and analyses of data that I realized that semantics could potentially play a key role in how dependent applicants came to view themselves in terms of their self-worth. Having rich and meaningful discussions with my supervisor around the term dependent alerted me of my researcher bias and encouraged me to revise my interpretations in light of my new learnings.

In addition, I engaged in the process of self-reflexivity by maintaining an ongoing *reflective journal* to track my “experiences, reactions, and emerging awareness of any assumptions or biases” (Morrow, 2005, p. 254) as they presented themselves through my research journey. My reflexivity helped me monitor my impressions and observations related to recruitment, interview sessions, ethical considerations and implications for both the participant community, and me as a researcher.

Finally, only *willing participants were recruited* for the study through a consent form to ensure genuine participation. Once they willingly consented, they were assured that they could refuse to answer any question or even withdraw from the study without suffering any negative consequences. At the outset of the interview, it was further clarified to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions posed through the interview. Efforts were made to build rapport with participants by sharing my background and personal interest in the project before the interview began.

**Transferability.** This criterion refers to the degree to which findings from one study can be applied to other settings. Although Shenton (2004) argues that it is an impossible task to demonstrate transferability of findings and conclusions from one qualitative study to another situation and population, researchers suggest that it is the responsibility of the investigator to provide sufficient contextual information about the study to enable the reader to judge its transferability criteria (Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the proposed study, transferability was ensured by providing detailed information about the research context and demographic characteristics of participants. In addition, my background information and experience with the phenomenon was also made available to the reader. When readers are supplied with sufficient contextual knowledge of the research setting and findings, they are better equipped to assess the potential usefulness of this research to their own individual contexts.

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to the idea of replicating a study and its findings if the same procedures and participants were to be used in the future (Shenton, 2004). For a study to be qualified as dependable, its procedures must be replicable and its research method clearly outlined (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured dependability of this study by providing a detailed and transparent description of the research processes and activities through an audit trail along with contextual information of the participants as well as myself.

**Confirmability.** This criterion refers to neutrality or the idea of conducting a study by reducing researcher bias. In other words, credibility ensures that “findings should represent, as far as is (humanly) possible, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher” (Gasson, 2004, p. 93). However, the intrusion of investigator bias is inevitable in qualitative research. While quantitative research advocates for “objectivity” by maintaining adequate distance between participants and researchers, Krefting (1991) believes that research findings are enhanced in qualitative research by decreasing distance between researcher and participants. Therefore, according to Guba and Lincoln (2005), confirmability is not about the neutrality of the researcher but rather transparency of the research process.

As a member of the participant community with a personal connection to immigrant issues, my interpretations and perspectives were bound to influence the findings of the study, thereby threatening confirmability. Guba (1981) suggests that having an awareness of one’s influence on the data via reflexivity is of crucial importance in ensuring confirmability. At the outset of the research process, I acknowledged my understandings and presuppositions of the phenomenon under study and made them available to the reader along with my personal background and any other information relevant to the research. In addition, I maintained a research journal to keep an account of my internal commentary, reactions, and impressions related to the research process right from its inception, to finally writing this report in order to “articulate how the inquirer is part of the setting, context, and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand (Schwandt, 2001, p. 224). My thesis supervisor served as an auditor in this research project by inviting discussions during the data analysis stage when themes were being generated. My supervisor also sought clarification regarding my developing interpretations and analytic procedures to ensure that my researcher bias did not mask potentially relevant findings. Through a consensual process, feedback was incorporated in the results. Additionally, member checks were conducted to ensure that the data in the form of interview transcripts corresponded with accounts participants had intended to offer.

**CHAPTER IV: Results**

The purpose of the study was to better understand the process of Career Identity Development (CID) among women immigrants arriving to Canada as dependent applicants under the Economic category. Exploring career identity using a grounded theory inspired approach allowed for a better understanding of the impact of varying circumstances on women’s interpretation and re-interpretation of their career identity over a period of time upon migration.

In this chapter, I present themes and subthemes that were generated from the data related to the CID of six women who immigrated to Canada as dependent applicants. Most of these themes appear to be linked sequentially, suggesting a temporal component to CID. A total of eight themes and nineteen subthemes were generated and are depicted in Table 4. The main themes are: On board the Canadian dream, Coming to terms with “dependent” status, Maintaining equilibrium, Tipping point, Grieving the loss of preferred career trajectory, Taking agency, Redirecting one’s career path, and Emergence of a strengthened career identity. The subthemes illuminate different but related aspects of each corresponding theme to provide a more nuanced understanding of participant experiences. While the first two themes, “On board the Canadian dream” and “Coming to terms with ‘dependent’ status” apply to pre-migration when migratory decisions are being made, the remaining six themes occur post-migration, through the duration of stay in Canada. This suggests that CID for dependent applicants may start to get impacted well before migration and continues to be developed upon migration.

Table 4  
*An Overview of Themes and Subthemes*

Migratory Phase	Themes	Subthemes
Pre-Migratory Phase	On board the Canadian dream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push versus pull factors</li> <li>• Decisions to maximize visa success</li> <li>• Disruptions in preferred career track</li> </ul>
	Coming to terms with “dependent” status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on career-related potential and employability</li> <li>• Perceptions related to “dependent” label</li> </ul>
Post-migratory phase	Maintaining equilibrium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming financially stable</li> <li>• Relational decision-making</li> </ul>
	Tipping point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased Focus on self</li> </ul>

- Disenchantment with short-term career goals
- Receiving positive affirmation
- Unmet career expectations
- Loss of career values
- Increased proactivity and self-motivation
- Overcoming emotional barriers
- Finding parallels and transferable skills
- Discovering a calling
- Shifting career identities
- Roller coaster journey
- Reconnecting with career values

Before I delve into the description of the themes, Table 5 below shows the representation of main themes for each participant to illustrate, at a glance, the themes as was experienced by each participant alongside the duration of stay post-migration. The time spent in Canada since migration is indicated in parentheses to give readers a sense of the temporal aspect of CID themes as it relates to each participant. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain participant anonymity.

Table 5  
*Themes and Their Representation by Participants*

Themes	Participants (Years in Canada)					
	Yasmin (1.5)	Sarah (6)	Chandi (8)	Jamie (12)	Swati (13)	Aduna (16)
On board the Canadian dream	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coming to terms with	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

“dependent” status						
Maintaining equilibrium		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tipping point		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grieving the loss of preferred career trajectory		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Taking agency	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Redirecting one’s career path	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Emergence of a strengthened career identity				✓	✓	✓

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I will now describe the themes and subthemes through participants’ account in terms of how their career identity evolved over time, from the point the decision to migrate to Canada was taken, up to present.

**On Board the Canadian Dream**

For all participants, this theme reflected how pre-migratory decisions were taken mutually, bearing in mind the shared values of leading a better quality of life abroad (in this case Canada) vis-à-vis their home country and the variety of reasons that prompted them to migrate to Canada. For some participants, getting on board the Canadian dream was also experienced as the disruption of a promising career track in favour of exploring better prospects in Canada for themselves and their families. This theme encompassed three subthemes: Push versus pull factors, Decisions to maximize visa success, and Disruptions in preferred career track.

**Push versus pull factors.** Participants seemed to distinguish between push and pull factors related to their pre-migratory decision to come to Canada. For some participants, pre-migratory decisions were taken due to aspects that drew them to the host country, such as better job opportunities and good quality of life. Many participants perceived Canada as having fewer social barriers to growth opportunities in career than their host country, as Aduna states:

*Here [in Canada] you have a chance. [It] doesn't matter where you are from. Doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman. Doesn't matter if you are handicap. Doesn't matter you know the colour of your skin. You have a chance... You can work. You can make money. You know what I mean... They are not that closing the door on your face.*

For others, there were aspects about their home country that they felt deterred them from continuing to reside there, such as not having opportunities to grow in their careers or to go back to school for further education after they had children, or due to instances of discrimination. For Chandi, even though she loved Ireland, the country she emigrated from, she could not see herself growing as a family in Ireland due to instances of racism she had experienced:

*I just couldn't see myself living in Ireland long term... I didn't see myself having children there. I found that it was still very new in term of experience to migration, to migrants. That is they have a very definite definition of who is Irish and who is not Irish... And I just didn't want to have children there for that reason.*

Chandi further added:

*I think [my husband] saw that I was done with Ireland... I was ready to move on and I had experience of instances of racism in Ireland and my husband did not like that. So I think I actually really wanted to go.*

**Decisions to maximize visa success.** In order to fulfill their dream of migrating to a country that provided them with opportunities, regardless of economic or social background, participants started organizing their lives and making decisions accordingly to ensure a successful visa application, such as getting married or deciding who the principal versus dependent applicant would be. On being asked how pre-migratory decisions were made, all participants unanimously stated that they did whatever needed to be done to achieve a successful outcome; families took steps to hasten and maximize the prospects of getting visa approval. For some, this meant coming to Canada as a spouse (through marriage) rather than on a student visa which would have taken longer to acquire, as was the case for Yasmin:

*I came here after marrying so it was my family actually...My parents wanted [that] my husband should sponsor [me and] so I completed my degree and for our case it was easier. If I applied for student visa, it will take longer time and as he sponsored me, I came here. I got my visa in 5 months. So it was easier. So that's why my parents took this decision.*

For Aduna, she was living with her partner during the pre-migratory stage. Upon advice from their lawyer, it was agreed that getting married and filing a joint application rather than applying individually would greatly increase their chances of success for visa approval:

*We were living together but we weren't married. So he did his own application and after that it turned to me...[partner said] “She is my wife for me and we are living together. We plan to have children.” And at that time we didn't have [our daughter] and the lawyer said, “You should get married.”*

More importantly, it meant giving serious consideration to whom among the two—the husband or wife—had a better chance at scoring more points based on Canada's point system for visa applications in the economic category. For all participants, husbands were chosen as the principal applicant, whereas the participants were filing as dependent applicants. Regardless of who initiated the migratory decision or who was designated as the principal/dependent applicant, it was a well informed and mutual decision where both participants were emotionally on board the “Canadian Dream.” For example, Sarah stated:

*So umm, I came home one evening after working two jobs. Actually I was working at a pub in the evening just to pay the bills and umm, and he told me he applied to live in Canada. We talked about it. And we'd been on a lot of vacations and we talked about the possibility...In my mind it was always a big dream but he did the application.*

**Disruptions in preferred career track.** For some participants, even though they were on board the Canadian dream and hopeful of a better life, immigration to Canada highlighted instances of disrupting “what could have been,” such as abandoning a promising or preferred career track. Swati displayed an intent to pursue a career in teaching as she had gotten admission into a Bachelor's of Education in Teacher's college but, for the sake of better prospects for the entire family, she accepted the opportunity to explore what Canada could offer to her family:

*My interests was definitely in teaching since the beginning. And even after I had my first daughter there, I was planning to do my teacher's college there. I wanted to go back to*

*school and do my B.Ed. and I had got admission, too, actually. Then it didn't work out because we came here.*

Another example of abandoning a preferred career track happened in Yasmin's case who, upon completion of her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, secured a job interview: “Ya because I had some really good references and I also applied in one bank. So ya, they interviewed me and so, maybe I don't know but if I tried I could get a job over there.” However, because Yasmin felt that there are better “scope and opportunities” in Canada career-wise, she was willing to suspend her career aspirations temporarily in her home country in favour of exploring opportunities in Canada.

### **Coming to Terms with “Dependent” Status**

This theme refers to how participants responded to the notion of applying as a dependent applicant while immigration efforts were taking hold beyond just an idea, whether it meant reflecting on their career-related potential and employment prospects in relation to their partners or reflecting on the perceptions associated with the “dependent” label.

**Reflecting on career-related potential and employability.** As pre-migratory decisions were being made, specifically those geared towards deciding who the principal applicant would be based on Canada's point system for visa applications, participants started reflecting on their career-related potential and comparing where they stood vis-à-vis their partners. While some gladly accepted their lower level of education as compared to their partners and anticipated employability upon immigration, for others not being able to establish themselves career-wise immediately upon migration was a bit unexpected and led to a process of self-reflection. Despite being professionally qualified and reporting having “enjoyed” two jobs in her home country, Sarah found it difficult to accept how her credentials compared to those of her husband on paper:

*The realization that, you know, my education hadn't been to the level of my husband's type thing. And there is definitely a realization of a little bit of self-worth where that's not quite as, you know, when you go and fill everything out... You realize that this information is now so important, you know.*

Despite being the primary breadwinner in her home country, Sarah further states:

*Even though in UK [home country] I was the primary earner 'coz my husband was unemployed, that didn't make so much of a difference on the application form...[So there is] like a little question about ME [laying emphasis] you know.*

Sarah’s account seems to suggest that as she went through the checklist of requirements (such as educational level, language proficiency, employment history, etc.) in the immigration application process, it led her to reflect on her self-worth. New parameters for defining self-worth as it related to career came to light upon making migratory decisions, regardless of her work status or work potential in her home country.

To ensure a successful outcome in terms of visa approval, most couples mutually decided to immigrate to the country where the principal applicant had greater prospects; for example, the presence of a site office in Canada for Sarah’s husband or recognition of an engineering degree in the new host country as was the case for Jamie’s husband. In such cases, while the principal applicant found employment within a short span of time upon immigration, the dependent applicant did “other things” related to childcare and domestic responsibilities, which was true for Swati:

*So he gave his exams, about 3-4 months [after emigrating]. He was finished giving his exams and he was so fortunate that he did get a contract right away at the hospital, Ottawa Hospital, which is good. Though it [was] just a contract but through that, you know he built his relationships. He built his career through that...But again I was not able to work full-time because I had my daughter. And of course I had to do other things.*

Based on participants’ inability to file as principal applicants due to possessing fewer credentials when compared to their husbands, some participants started to perceive themselves as having diminished chances of employability in Canada. With regard to her lack of proficiency in English, Jamie stated:

*The most important [thing] is that English is not our first language. When you cannot express yourself [then] how can you find a job outside? Even though you have a lot of knowledge in your mind, you cannot show people...You cannot express. And people cannot say and give you the chance and say you are a good candidate.*

Some participants who assumed the caregiver role shortly after arriving to Canada went to the extent of hypothesizing that, had they instead had employment upon migration followed by having children, they would have likely opted for a maternity leave and potentially faced fewer barriers to resuming their career compared to what they were presently experiencing. However, since they were unable to obtain employment upon arriving in Canada, time and effort was redirected towards child rearing. Participants explained that doing so rendered acquiring

inertia for building their careers more challenging compared to taking a hiatus from work to attend to children with the knowledge that they could return to work thereafter. This experience was aptly captured by Chandi in the following excerpt:

*I think actually if I had a permanent position in Canada before I had my son, maybe I wouldn't have left my job. Maybe I wouldn't have gone a year [without investing in my career] ...Because at 4 months [after having a baby], it would have been daycare and I would have been working, right?*

Even though participants willingly and mutually decided to provide childcare to their children, there was a gradual realization of the price they had had to pay for their own career prospects in Canada. Chandi expressed, “I think, for society, if you stay at home, you definitely pay a penalty. But it's not a decision that I regret, ya. But I think in the workforce you are penalized.”

**Perceptions of “dependent” label.** Interestingly, for all participants the decision to apply as the dependent applicant was not only mutual between them and their husband but was also perceived as the right thing to do given their chances of receiving fewer points than their spouse. However, participants reacted differently to being labelled as “dependent.” Some participants naturally identified with their dependent status upon immigration and accepted certain reliance on their husbands. For instance, Jamie's reconciliation with her dependent status led her to believe and accept, before migrating to Canada, that she would have to start from scratch to establish a career in her new host country:

*For me I say it's okay. I say I started from the beginning [so] I just think I am zero...I started from zero and went one to two from here. It's okay. I have to do everything to get a nice job. You cannot, [so] when you cannot, [then] you have to start from the beginning, from zero. Because your English is not good, you know. You don't understand anything.*

A similar expectation was conveyed by Swati in terms of having to re-establish herself career-wise upon immigration: “Well of course I knew there would be challenges. We already knew it would be a struggle here because obviously, umm, everything had to be started from the beginning. We had to do everything right from the bottom, right?”

For Aduna, accepting her dependent status in Canada implied being “below zero” in terms of building a career in Canada because she believed the following put her at a

disadvantage: “Because no diploma [recognition]. I wasn’t speaking English. I didn’t have any work [experience in Canada].” Jamie too surrendered herself to the “dependent” label, lamenting certain loss of freedom with the following analogy: “You cannot live very, how to say that. Like the bird, [where] you just spread your wings and do what you want.”

For most participants, coming to terms with their “dependent” status also implied that they felt that they had no option but to join their husband after receiving visa approval for Canada. Aduna states:

*So in the process [of making pre-migratory decisions], my feeling was, you know... You got the interview... Now he is leaving. So I don’t have a choice. I have to go with him. I like that man, so no choice. I am going with him.*

Other participants found being called a “dependent” spouse had minimizing effects on their self-esteem. For example, Chandi reacted sharply during the interview to the notion of being called a “trailing spouse” by others and felt it was demeaning to characterize women immigrating as “dependents,” even if they technically were dependent applicants. She disclosed that upon reading the study description, she was surprised and upset at the same time for being called a “dependent” as she presumed to have entered on a “common-spouse status.” Chandi was compelled to check the internet prior to the interview and revealed that she was “annoyed” at how this section of the immigrant population was referred to. She expressed her disapproval as follows:

*I don’t mind being the secondary applicant on paper but I do mind being called dependent, because it sounds like I have no history. That I didn’t do anything and just came as a dependent... You know like he just took me on a leash and I was like... It’s not like that. I had to work hard to earn my place in Canada.*

Chandi’s reaction was largely because she believed her credentials, such as a doctoral degree and fluency in French, bolstered the application and contributed equally in getting visa approval. According to her, she went through the same rigour in terms of background check and providing documentation as her husband. From that perspective, Chandi felt it was unfair to characterize dependent applicants with labels such as “dependent” and “trailing.”

Regardless of participants’ response to labels such as dependent applicant or trailing spouse, coming to terms with their dependent status “on paper” prompted many participants to

reassess their “career-worth” vis-à-vis their partners as they were preparing to consider immigration to Canada.

### **Maintaining Equilibrium**

Upon arrival in Canada, most participants did whatever was required of them to maintain equilibrium and fulfill needs related to a smooth transition for their families. These needs could relate to either economic survival or childcare responsibilities, or efforts to advance the career of the designated principal applicant—in this case the participants’ husbands, as captured by the following two subthemes: Becoming financially stable and Relational-decision making.

**Becoming financially stable.** The primary need for most of the participants’ families upon migration was financial stability. This was especially true if the principal applicant was unable to immediately find stable employment and/or was pursuing post-migratory education and training. In such cases, the focus for most participants turned to getting “any job” that came their way. Consequently, they had less discretion in choosing what they wanted to do in terms of career goals, as explained by Jamie:

*So first when you come to here you have to be survival. Survival means if your husband finds a job, [then] you don’t need to think a lot. If your husband don’t find a job, [then] you have to take your responsibility to take care of your home. So when you choose a career, that means you don’t have too much choice to make. If your condition is good, you have more chance to choose what you like. You can choose something you really want to do. If you don’t have any choice, you will just pick up any job that people will give to you.*

Jamie’s experience also elucidates how fulfilling a “survival-based” career decision is connected to ensuring a smooth transition.

Based on the availability of time and scheduling issues, for some participants like Swati, maintaining equilibrium meant working evening shifts and weekends to supplement the family’s income and sustain a living with two young kids. Swati quit pursuing her career goals based on perceived incompatibilities, such as lack of flexible options within her desired occupation and prioritizing her children. Swati decided to take up temporary jobs to be able to create space for raising her children, and did so in a manner to not interfere with her husband’s career advancement. Swati describes this act of maintaining balance in the family as:

*So basically in the beginning of course...I had to be home because of my girls. We worked it out so that my husband could work in the mornings, you know full-time. And I was just working part-time in the evenings, just as a sales associate for a couple, few years.*

**Relational decision-making.** This subtheme captures the aspect related to participants prioritizing their families’ needs, over their own needs, in order to maintain equilibrium within the family upon migration. For instance, deciding beforehand who would shoulder childcare responsibilities post-migration, formed an integral aspect of pre-migratory decisions. For Sarah, it was a conscious and mutual decision with her spouse before migrating that she would assume the caregiver role, even if it meant departing from her career path:

*The last position I had was quite professional. It was an office role and I would go out to their companies and present information about the company that I worked for. And I enjoyed that and I got paid well to do that and, umm... And when I got married and we decided to have children, we decided that I would stay home. And that basically stopped my career. And to now go back to that would be very difficult.*

Therefore, for half of the participants (i.e., Sarah, Chandi, and Jamie), immigration resulted in immersing themselves in the caregiver role to their young children and putting all aspirations on hold while their husbands could singularly focus on their career. As participants perceived their husbands with principal applicant status as having a higher chance of finding jobs, they made every effort to support their husbands to “get things going.”

From the above examples, it is apparent that for most participants the initial period upon immigration was marked by taking up a role that facilitated the smooth transition of the family, whether it meant being an extra contributor to family income, or being a caregiver and solely focusing on their children. Most decisions appeared driven by the need to maintain balance in the family and to minimize any disruptive influence during the early settlement phase of post-migration.

### **Tipping Point**

Five of the six participants arrived to Canada as a young family with either one child or had children soon after arriving to Canada. After consciously taking up childcare responsibilities, they completely immersed themselves in that role and, at one point, subsequently found themselves wondering about and reflecting on their achievements on the work front. With the

passing of years during their stay in Canada, participants began to identify what they felt they had lost with respect to their careers while performing roles related to being a mother and wife. This marked a critical juncture in their CID when they “tipped” towards taking agency by revisiting their career goals to see what might best fit with their individual circumstances. The Tipping point theme encompassed three subthemes: Increased focus on self, Disenchantment with short-term career goals, and Receiving positive affirmation.

**Increased focus on self.** For most participants, the tipping point seemed to manifest when their children started going to school, affording them more time to focus on themselves and what they “missed” career-wise while performing other life-roles. For example, Chandi stated that she liked “doing one thing at a time” and it was only after her son started preschool that space was created to rethink her career:

*So while I was raising [my son] like he had his own you know [time]. Umm, sometimes he went to playgroup...From the time he was 3, I had a couple of hours to myself and that's when I went back to my research. But I kept him only part-time because he was not adjusting [at the daycare]. So all of these little things delayed my return to the workforce. So it was a little unexpected, but it all delayed [returning to the workforce]. So now I find that, umm, he is at school full time. He is fine and I can concentrate on myself.*

For Sarah, the feeling was more intense upon realizing she missed the career she loved prior to immigration:

*You know I was in a new country alone with a child now. So I never missed a career at that point because I was trying to build a life, you know. And it's not until now when my children have gone to school that now I think, “Oh I do miss my career” you know. I should go out and find a career and see what I can do because I feel it is necessary for both people to contribute to the household.*

**Disenchantment with short-term career goals.** In other instances, the tipping point occurred when participants persevered in jobs that were never really their “cup of tea” or when they became too disenchanting with chasing short-term employment goals to maintain equilibrium. Both these scenarios were applicable in Swati’s case. Swati was working two different jobs as a sales associate, which she neither felt inclined towards nor liked it because of the odd hours and being unable to spend time with her family of young children, yet did it to

sustain a living. Swati explains this point in her life that led her to return to her original goal of pursuing a career in teaching:

*It was hard for me too because I used to work till late nights—9, 10 o'clock coming back home and we would hardly see each other. Me and my husband...Ya, because of the timings. And he would take care of my girl in the evening and I would go for my job... And then I decided, “Let me do something for my MY [laying emphasis] career,” what I wanted to do, you know. And that’s how I started looking for options of a career in teaching.*

**Receiving positive affirmation.** The tipping point for some participants occurred upon receiving positive affirmation from other people, almost like a “wake-up call” before it got too late to resume a career. After feeling “depressed for one year” upon not finding employment in Canada, Aduna slowly started interacting with people, which in turn motivated her to do something about herself:

*I start to be happy when I start meeting people, asking questions to people...They said, “No you can’t go back. No you don’t worry. You can find a job, you can work” is when I start thinking... “Oh, maybe I can do something about myself.”*

Participants’ realizations that they still nurtured career dreams that got lost along the way, while performing multiple roles to maintain balance and harmony in the family, seemed a critical point in their CID—one that included a process of mourning, which I address in the next theme.

### **Grieving the Loss of Preferred Career Trajectory**

All participants either had a diploma/college degree and were on a career track, or had a stable job back home. Some were on the threshold of pursuing advanced studies in their chosen occupational field, but were compelled to put such goals aside, particularly post-migration. Once the initial demands related to settlement in a new country were resolved, some participants described realizing that they “miss their career” and eventually accepting this was the case. This included mourning the loss of a career track they either pursued or aspired to in their home country. While some participants experienced this theme as a lack of consistency between what they set out to achieve career-wise pre-migration versus what unfolded post-migration, for others, this theme implied a process of mourning the loss of career values.

**Unmet career expectations.** While some participants never really thought about their career identity until they were pointedly asked about it, other participants described on their own

accord how they went through a process of mourning their “lost careers” in order to reconcile with the disappointment associated with unmet career expectations. For instance, Chandi had finished her doctoral studies in her home country and worked as a researcher in different contexts. As she always saw herself as a working person, she found it difficult to contend with her non-working status after immigrating to Canada. After several years of unemployment despite trying to find work based on her career values, she realized she needed to engage in an active process of grieving a career that she once aspired to: “So my expectations changed. I feel like, you know I am a little bit grieving the career I didn’t have while I was a caregiver. I have to grieve that, you know.”

Later in the interview, Chandi went on to express her disappointment at not meeting her expectations of “working full-time somewhere,” something she envisioned while pursuing her doctoral studies. Expressing the discrepancy between her aspirations and what eventually unfolded upon immigration, she says:

*So it has definitely been a disappointment...Let’s say, right now, where I am at is not where I imagined I would be when I was 20 in terms of my career, you know. That’s a little bit of a grieving process for me, to be honest.*

Chandi also alluded to the existential nature of the choices women face and, consequently, that grieving of some kind was inevitable:

*Either you have a job, you have a career and you have your kids but you are completely burnt out and you feel like you are not giving enough time to your kids or your job. So you can’t have it all...So maybe if I had decided not to have children and just to have my career I would grieve not having children. So it’s like for women, it’s very hard.*

Like Chandi, Swati expressed disappointment of not being able to realize her expectation of pursuing a career in teaching upon migration despite nurturing those dreams in her home country:

*Then we moved here. After that so it [teaching career] didn’t work out and I definitely wanted to do something...Get at least a degree in teaching and ya get formal degree or something...But of course things do not work as you know, as you want.*

Still yet, for some participants, the loss of a preferred career trajectory was felt so intensely that it seemed like a loss of a career identity to them. Sarah, who was working two jobs back in England, reported that she “enjoyed” her office role and valued the contribution she

made to the organization and her family. However, on being queried about how she perceived her current career identity, she responded “there is a lack of [a career identity] really. I really feel like I have lost that you know, umm, that’s what I would say... Ya, it kind of makes me sad a bit.” The change in her working status upon migration is perhaps something Sarah had not expected, given the fact that she valued the idea of both partners contributing to the family income.

**Loss of career values.** For Aduna, the grieving process implied mourning the loss of values she associated with having a career, such as having the choice and freedom to make decisions independently of others, and a gradual acceptance of living a life without those values post-migration. Aduna explains:

*At least over there [home country], I have something to hold on to. When I came here I was only on my husband, that’s it. You know what I mean... [Back home] I have my job, I have my freedom, you know. I can go, I can make my own decisions for me.*

Accepting her changed circumstances upon migration, Aduna further stated: “[In Canada], I didn’t have any [career]...I can’t see myself doing something, doing a job, having work, nothing...for me okay that is going to be my life, everyday depending on him, staying home.”

Therefore, while the main theme reflected participants’ grief of what they perceived was missing upon migration, whether it was their preferred career trajectory or values associated with career, there also appeared to be a degree of acceptance of their situation post-migration. This acceptance in turn allowed them to think forward and helped them believe that they needed to take charge to change their status quo.

### **Taking Agency**

For most participants, taking agency seemed to occur after the tipping point or grieving process and involved the realization that no one but them can change the course of their career direction. Taking agency reflected a proactive approach where participants exhibited self-motivation towards advancing their career in the form of engaging in further education or retraining post-migration. For other participants, taking agency involved a conscious effort to step out of their comfort zone and overcome emotional barriers to achieve desirable career outcomes.

**Increased proactivity and self-motivation.** This subtheme points to participants realizing that “opportunities are everywhere” and that it was up to them to actively look for these

opportunities. Seeking information, educating themselves about laws and norms related to Canadian work culture, and prepping themselves for post-migratory education were some of the examples participants provided.

Aduna describes taking agency within her life as:

*...when you want to do something about yourself you have to look for the information.*

*The information will never [knocks twice on table] knock on your door and say, “Hello, I am the information, you now have to do that.” No, you have to look for it.*

For Aduna, exploring options to have her courses paid through grants offered by the government, as well as finding ways for covering miscellaneous costs such as for books and parking were also examples of reconnecting to her sense of agency:

*Like for my courses I said, “How I am going to afford that? They are expensive courses.*

*Okay I’ll find a way. I am not going to pay for my courses.” I found a website. I found Early Childhood Education grants. They give you the money, they pay for my courses.*

Similarly, Yasmin alluded to being in the information-gathering phase, where she knew that in order to put her preferred career back on track, she had to acquire Canadian credentials, either through work or volunteering engagements:

*I am not, umm, completely ready to do a corporate job. For that, I have to gather some*

*experiences, like some real Canadian work experience or some voluntary work*

*experience but I am, umm, I am now in that phase to gathering [information about] some opportunities, looking for some scopes*

Another example of Yasmin’s proactivity was reflected by her taking classes, on her own accord, to improve language fluency to prepare herself for post-migratory education. She stated, “though it’s not required for me but I thought...I had enough time, I haven’t started studying yet so I did that course.”

Some participants highlighted the role of self-motivation in navigating career decisions, as expressed by Jamie:

*Yes I wanted to be pushed by myself because nobody [can] push me and nobody can help you. You know, because [in] everything you have to help yourself. You have to get self-motivation even though you say that okay other people provide you the environment.*

At another point in the interview, Jamie echoed a similar sentiment when she said that no one but she alone was in a position to help herself; in her case, it meant interacting with people despite

her barriers to communicating in English. Jamie believed isolating herself from the outside world would not result in anything fruitful in terms of finding work:

*All the time I think, “It’s okay, it’s okay. You have to walk out [and not] stay at home. If you stay home, nobody can help you. Your English will be at the same level, you know. You cannot find a job, you cannot meet new people.”*

**Overcoming emotional barriers.** Taking agency also meant stepping out of one’s comfort zone and overcoming emotional barriers while making efforts to further education. For instance, Swati compromised on her original career goals by accepting job positions in a different occupational field that made her experience initial discomfort. She had to quit pursuing her passion for a career in teaching upon immigration and was compelled to enter the field of retail marketing to supplement family income. Although later she recounts her job experiences in Canada as useful in her professional endeavours, at the time Swati resisted the idea of taking up a job that involved interacting with people due to her shy nature. Swati describes her job as a Sales Associate in the following words:

*It did change me a lot as a person. Just going out and into a field, where you know I never thought I would ever go. It did change me a lot. I was very shy before. Like in India I was totally not very outgoing, but here everything changed. I mean, umm, everything you have to do yourself here, right? And everything was, it was kind of a lot of change for me I guess. Ya, it’s difficult for me to explain.*

In terms of overcoming emotional barriers, Jamie experienced negative emotions, such as shame and embarrassment, associated with not being able to engage in what she perceived to be age appropriate education. She expressed this process as:

*I have to go to high school. At that time, it’s how to say that. It’s very complex, complicated because right now you are a mom. How to say that, this is a different time, and also you are not going to university. If you are going to university it’s okay. It’s a match for your age. It’s a match for your education. You have to pass your emotional barrier. It’s also you [have to] challenge yourself.*

However, for some participants, overcoming emotional barriers was accompanied by feelings of anxiety as they faced the challenging task of rebuilding their career which, to many of them, was experienced as an overwhelming process. With regard to her attempts to go back to being employed as a hairstylist or on being self-employed, Sarah explained this feeling:

*It's kind of scary though thinking about actually becoming [a hairstylist] you know. Putting a label on it now...So I had a job title, because it was given to me by employment. But now...To become self-employed, it's quite daunting for me to think this is my business. Because I don't want to think of myself in those terms you know.*

Therefore, on the one hand, taking agency referred to overcoming barriers related to finding work upon immigration by either putting oneself out there, searching for information that may not be readily available, and/or engaging in positive self-talk. On the other hand, taking agency also referred to optimizing the supports one had in place to facilitate the next career-related steps.

### **Redirecting One's Career Path**

This theme is characterized by participants making connections to the career goals they once cherished through finding parallels with their previous career track or transferring skills by making a lateral move within the same domain of career, rather than looking for a change per se. For others, this theme was experienced as a chance to discover their calling through chance factors. This theme applied largely to participants who had spent several years in Canada navigating the work environment. By this time, these participants had found their bearings in a land foreign to them and had a fairly good understanding of their strengths and limitations within that new context that led to different career decisions. The two subthemes related to redirecting a career path were Finding parallels and transferable skills, and Discovering a calling.

**Finding parallels and transferable skills.** Both Jamie and Swati opted for a career in Early Childhood Education (ECE) rather than their original career choice of teaching, as ECE permitted them to stay in touch with the field of education. Although Swati had a specific goal of teaching young children, she was able to partially fulfill her dream by working as an Early Childhood Educator at an elementary school. She described this as:

*I always wanted to be, you know doing something with kids. So teaching especially little kids, not even like older ones [laughing], ya elementary school. Teaching was one of my main passion in the beginning, since the beginning. So ya the wait was nice that I could continue here as an ECE.*

To some participants, rather than revisiting former career goals, immigration provided them with an opportunity for something that, from their perspective, was new and better yet still aligned with pre-migratory aspirations. In her home country, Jamie was an accountant—a career

she “didn’t like” and believed was not meant for her; yet she pursued it at the behest of her parents who believed a job in accounting would offer more stability. Moving to Canada provided Jamie with a second chance to explore the option of being in a field closely associated with teaching.

For Chandi, it was a gradual process of feeling disillusioned with a career in academia that led her to realize that she needed to move on by using transferable skills to look for alternative options. This entailed quitting her long cherished goal of being a researcher which she believed would lead her to somewhere “special,” a place that would have led her to fulfill her career values related to stability and financial security. Despite repeated efforts to establish herself in a research-oriented career and a missed opportunity of securing a postdoctoral position with a professor at a university due to unavailability of funds, she was unable to end up in the career she yearned for. It is at this juncture that Chandi started hoping for a lateral move, rather than career advancement in research:

*That’s why I started going to organizations like World Skills. I thought, “I have transferable skills and I can use my skills in other way. I can still use my skills of research but in a position that would pay me, you know a maybe decent [salary].”*

**Discovering a calling.** Some participants found their calling through sheer happenstance. Such was the case for Aduna. She had never visualized herself as working with children until she started working at a Montessori school, an opportunity introduced by a patron she met in her previous career attempt in Canada as a restaurateur. Initially, Aduna’s love for cooking led her to establish a restaurant business with her husband, where she assumed the role of head chef. However, the restaurant business failed to take off due to financial losses. Eventually, she had to quit her career as a chef despite believing it to be her “dream” and her “baby.” Had she not met her “mentor” in her failed career as a restaurateur, she would not have discovered her calling of working with children. Aduna worked for 5 years at the Montessori school before she decided to acquire accreditation through ECE. Here, she describes her passion of working with children:

*I never thought I can work with children [laughs]. If you met me like 15 years ago [and asked] “Aduna you are hoping to work with children?” ...Oh no, I will say NEVER [laughs]. Even my family will say, “You are working with children, no way.” I say, “OH YES!”*

From the above accounts, it is apparent that most participants who had spent several years in Canada seemed to be well placed in terms of finding parallels or discovering what their calling was, or else were on the verge of venturing into something entirely different than what they set out for based on their interests and pre-migratory aspirations. Therefore, this theme is characterized by hope and a forward looking attitude for most participants.

### **Emergence of a Strengthened Career Identity**

This theme represents one of the high point(s) in a seemingly arduous and challenging journey for women immigrants arriving as dependent applicants in Canada. Regardless of what participants had been through post-migration, most of them, particularly those who had spent several years in Canada, experienced a shift in their career identities, a range of emotions, and a reconnection with their career values as they reminisced about their career journey.

**Shifting career identities.** Based on the demands of the new work environment in Canada, participants’ perceptions of their career-related interests and career potential had notably changed. After spending 8 years in Canada, Chandi felt that her career identity had “recently changed” and was “taking another shape,” with the hope that “things [career-related circumstances] could look different in 5 years.” When asked about her career identity, Jamie described feeling independent, from her earlier state of feeling dependent in the following words:

*You change from how to be a dependent woman to independent woman in Canada. This is a change. It’s a big difference. Because when you applied for that [visa], you are dependent on your husband...but right now you become yourself independent*

For participants like Swati, Aduna, and Jamie, this period coincided with a stage of life where their children were relatively grown up and/or childcare costs and responsibilities were no longer a primary concern either due to the children’s age or due to availability of finances to afford day care while participants were at work. Even participants who were in Canada for less long recognized that the process of establishing a career would take time. For instance Yasmin, who was a relatively recent immigrant and had spent only a year and a half in Canada, was aware of the roadblocks ahead and the anticipated timeline to pursue her preferred career track. She stated, “...it takes time, right? You have to work. You have to learn a new language. And you have to make some good communication [network]... And you have to keep searching and searching. It will take a lot of time.”

**Roller coaster journey.** Upon noticing a strengthened career identity, most participants looked back at their career trajectory as a roller coaster ride, full of ups and downs. Therefore, while some participants experienced pride and a sense of achievement as they recounted their career journey, others found their journey particularly difficult. For instance, Jamie was able to laugh as she looked back at her career-related experiences, which at that time was nothing short of disappointment and frustration. She narrated a specific incident of going for an interview at Tim Hortons despite difficulties communicating in English and could not help herself from laughing:

*So they said you can come here for interview. And I go over there and they started asking me questions. And I don't understand one sentence [laughs heartily]. And you can imagine when I get out I don't understand anything [laughs again]. And my husband said, “I don't understand you. Where is the courage you get? You don't understand anything but you get in [to the interview]” [continues laughing].*

For Swati on the other hand, reminiscing about her career journey was an emotional experience, as she teared up while recalling some of the challenges and gut wrenching decisions she had to make throughout the process:

*It was emotionally like a lot of ups and downs because I used to struggle with so many things. I had to go to work. I mean I had to study. I had to do my assignments on time. I had to look after my own kids. I had to look after day care kids you know...Emotionally it was a lot of things going on. And then in between my in-laws would come here to visit us. Then family being here. Ya family obligations.*

**Reconnecting with career values.** Regardless of the challenges they faced along the way, a strengthened career identity enabled participants to eventually become independent, literally and figuratively, which presented a sharp contrast to their entry status on the visa application form. A strengthened career identity was also reflected in participants seeking the values they desired within a career in the very first place, whether it related to financial independence, having choice and being able to say “no,” or making a meaningful contribution to society. The significance attached to having a strengthened career identity is well captured by Aduna:

*If you depend on a man, you depend to a system. You are not free...You have to earn your own money. As a woman, don't depend to anyone, even if you LOVE [laying emphasis]*

*your husband. You love your family. I am sorry, you have to have your own independency, you know. You have to have your own freedom. Then you can say NO.*

Interestingly, while for some participants having a fulfilling and stable career at the time of the interviews made them feel they had peaked career-wise, others perceived it as just one of the steps in a long series of future endeavours for career growth, as expressed by Jamie: “Right now I am happy, but still it’s not enough for me. I still need to continue study.” Jamie expressed a desire for pursuing a part-time postgraduate degree to enhance her career prospects further, despite feeling fortunate to get a permanent job with a school board.

## CHAPTER V: Discussion

With this study, I sought to explore the career identity development (CID) of immigrant women arriving to Canada as dependent applicants under the economic class of migrants. Research questions pursued in this study included exploring pre-and post-migratory career decisions, perceived barriers and facilitators, and immigrant women’s aspirations and expectations compared to what actually unfolded in light of immigrating to Canada. A qualitative enquiry inspired by a grounded theory methodology was carried out to identify some of the key themes relevant to immigrant women’s career identity and possible interactions between those themes.

In this chapter, I briefly summarize the results and critically discuss each main theme in light of the existing literature and my interpretations. I have divided the discussion broadly into pre-migratory and post-migratory phases. I will conclude the chapter by discussing the implications and limitations of the study along with suggestions for future research.

### Summary of Main Results

Six participants who had emigrated from different countries and spent varying lengths of time in Canada were interviewed for the purpose of the study. Based on the career-related experiences during pre- and post-migratory periods shared by participants, eight main themes and nineteen subthemes were generated which shed light on the process of CID. The first two main themes, On board the Canadian dream and Coming to terms with “dependent” status unfolded during pre-migration when migratory decisions were being made. The remaining six themes—Maintaining equilibrium, Tipping point, Grieving loss of preferred career trajectory, Taking agency, Redirecting one’s career path, and Emergence of a strengthened career identity—occurred post-migration, through the duration of stay in Canada.

While CID is not conceptualized as a linear process, the themes generated appear sequentially linked and offer a sense of how career identity may evolve over time in response to varying demands upon migration. Depending on their stage of life, education level, perception, and presence of barriers and supports for career development, each participant experienced a different career trajectory, yet shared similar experiences related to CID. Given that all participants either displayed an intent to pursue a career or had established careers back home,

immigration to Canada compelled most women to reposition themselves career-wise vis-à-vis their spouses and the changed work environment.

Participants and their family were *on board the Canadian dream* in hopes of experiencing an increased quality of life and fewer barriers related to career. *Coming to terms with “dependent” status* implied how participants responded to the notion of applying as a dependent applicant while pre-migratory decisions were being made. Canada’s point system for visa applications led participants to engage in a process of self-reflection regarding their career-related potential vis-à-vis their partners’. Post-migration, participants did whatever was necessary on their part in *maintaining equilibrium* and fulfilling needs to ensure a smooth transition for their families. This included doing jobs for supplementing family income, engaging in childcare responsibilities, and investing fully in their partners’ career advancement. After immersing themselves in various life roles, participants one day found themselves reflecting on their career; with the passing of years, participants began to identify what they felt they had given up with respect to their careers. This marked a *tipping point* towards revisiting their career goals to see what corresponded best with their unique circumstances. During this process of revisiting, participants took notice of a discrepancy between what they aspired to in terms of a career before migrating versus what actually unfolded upon migration. Their experiences shed light on how they made sense of the inconsistency and its influence on their developing career identity in the host country. For some participants, *grieving the loss* of their desired career track allowed them to accept their new work-life reality, which in turn prompted participants to take meaningful action towards establishing their careers. *Taking agency* was reflected in terms of displaying a positive attitude and openness to new experiences. Over a period of time, participants engaged in the process of *redirecting their career path* by either finding parallels with previously cherished career goals or discovering their calling. Eventually, the *emergence of a strengthened career identity* became apparent compared to the perhaps fragmented career identity during the initial years of settlement in host country. This strengthened career identity was reflected in participants obtaining a career more meaningful to them as well as fulfilling some of the values they cherished within a career. However, few participants believed that a strengthened career identity represented a final destination; rather, they believed it to be just another step in a long series of future endeavours for career growth.

### **Pre-migratory Phase**

One of the research questions pursued in the study included exploring the impact of pre-migratory experiences on immigrant women’s CID. The following section highlights some of the decisions taken by participants and their families pre-migration that ostensibly shaped their developing career identity.

**On board the Canadian dream.** Chen (2008) describes immigrants under the economic class as a group of highly educated and career-focused individuals with a keen desire to participate in the host country’s economy upon migration. In this study, participants under the economic category came to Canada for a variety of reasons. Some participants left their home countries due to factors in the host country that they found attractive, such as increased career opportunities, better quality of life and fewer social barriers to career growth compared to their home countries—what perhaps could be referred to as *pull factors*. Participants also felt deterred from continuing to live in their own countries—that is *push factors*—such as discrimination and a lack of opportunities to grow in their careers after marriage. For most participants, the merits of relocating to another country seemed to outweigh the disadvantages. This finding supports the notion of Canada representing a desirable destination for potential immigrants (Michalowski & Tran, 2008).

Another aspect of being on board the Canadian dream and making pre-migratory decisions related to deciding who among husband and wife would apply as the principal applicant versus dependent applicant, in a way that strengthened the visa application. Participants described a decision-making process that seemed aligned with Canada’s point system under the economic class whereby the spouse, having the potential of scoring more points, applied as the principal applicant (Banerjee & Phan, 2015). In the present study, it was unanimously agreed within couples that the husband would be the principal applicant because of their higher human capital and, consequently, the wives would apply as their dependents. While these pre-migratory decisions are reflective of practical reasons for assigning the husband as principal applicant, this finding also lends support to the gendered pattern of immigration noted in the literature, where the majority of migratory decisions are led by men while women follow them as their wives or dependents (Boyle, Cooke, Halfacree, & Smith, 1999; Human Development Report, 2009; Inglis, 2003).

Similarly, a level of commitment was found in participants and their families to engage in any decision or action that would bring them a step closer to the “Canadian dream.” This implied that participants started organizing their lives pre-migration to enhance their chances of success of relocating to Canada. Decisions such as getting married, delaying the process of having children, and foregoing education in home country, were some of the examples indicative of managing their lives around their Canadian dream. For many immigrants, marriage was a successful strategy to facilitate migration at both an individual and family level (Palriwala & Uberoi, 2005).

**Coming to terms with “dependent” status.** Irrespective of the migratory decision being made collaboratively, applying as a dependent applicant had implications for how participants came to perceive themselves, particularly in terms of their career-related potential and employability prospects in Canada. The decision to migrate and the corresponding “dependent” status had participants engaging in a process of re-assessing their “career-worth” or potential vis-à-vis that of their partners’ as conveyed through the application requirements. In most cases, participants perceived themselves as having diminished chances of employability in Canada, and consequently redirected their attention towards other life roles such as child rearing.

Particularly noteworthy is participant observations that redirecting time and energy toward raising children seemed to impede career-building inertia. In their view, this rendered establishing a new career after having children more challenging compared to returning to an already established career after a maternity leave. Some participants, particularly those who believed they possessed qualifications at par with those of their spouse and therefore could have applied as the primary applicant, questioned how things may have turned out differently career-wise had they not been assigned “dependent” status. These participants were mostly referring to how principal applicant status may have influenced aspects related to their employability. While previous research has established that dependent women often accept part-time and low pressure jobs due to acceptance of the fact they will be unable to pursue full-fledged career options (Purkayastha, 2005; Shah, 1998), this finding reflects how dependent status may have far-reaching implications for the applicant’s sense of career identity.

Within the literature considering different migratory contexts, dependent migrants are often labelled as “tied-movers” (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Compton & Pollak, 2007) or “trailing spouses” (Bayes, 1989; Cooke, 2001; van Der Klis & Mulder, 2008). These labels are indicative

of the accompanying spouse’s secondary status in relation to the primary mover. Characterizing accompanying spouses with such labels can have varying effects; for instance, while some women believed the label “trailing spouse” was representative of their experience, others found it derogatory and objectionable (Bayes, 1989). In this study too, mixed reactions were reported to being characterized as “dependents” in the study description and/or participant awareness of being referred to as “trailing spouses” in the literature. For some, it led to defending their career potential based, for example, on possessing higher education (e.g., Ph.D.) and fluency in both of Canada’s official languages. Still others felt the point system was somewhat invalidating and were regretful that labels such as “dependent” or “trailing spouse” could unfairly fuel a certain stereotype. In contrast, other participants seemed less concerned by the terms or even identified with them, acknowledging that certain dependency on the husband was necessary for reasons related to finances or language/communication.

### **Post-migratory Phase**

Another set of research questions pursued in the study pertained to exploring post-migratory experiences, both facilitative and hindering, that dependent women faced along their career journey and how those experiences shaped their developing career identity. This section also depicts immigrant women’s aspirations and expectations compared to what actually unfolded in light of immigrating to Canada.

**Maintaining equilibrium.** Shuttling between home- and work-related demands and synchronizing activities of all family members requires most immigrant women to assume the role of a “family organizer” (Suto, 2009, p. 422); a role intended to shield the family from transitional challenges of immigration and lend support to the spouse’s career growth. This was true for most participants in the study who juggled various roles within the family to either supplement family income or assume the caretaker’s role to maintain equilibrium in the family. Performing multiple life roles as participants progressed through various stages of their lives as a homemaker/parent, worker, spouse, and sometimes student, alludes to the developmental approach taken by the prominent career theorist—Donald Super. According to Super’s (1990) Life-Span/Life-Space Theory of career development, career is viewed as an ongoing process and a combination of the various life roles a person engages in and that varies in salience over the course of his/her lifetime.

Like Suto’s (2009) participants, women in this study alluded to the challenges of “having to do everything themselves,” particularly in the absence of extended family in the host country. Attending to the needs of all family members while their husbands were busy building their careers also provides support to the two theoretical frameworks proposed to explain the poor employment outcomes associated with the dependent status. The human capital approach (Mincer, 1978; Sandell, 1977) and its extension known as the family investment hypothesis (Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2009; Worswick, 1999) posit that pre-migratory decisions are made to optimize the monetary advantage of the family as a whole. In this study, while most husbands found employment within a short span of time owing to their higher human capital, their wives, that is participants in this study, experienced delays in finding their foothold career-wise. Further, due to gender-based roles, participants with dependent status were mostly thrust into supportive and care-giving roles within the family upon immigration, regardless of their professional background (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Purkayastha, 2005).

Taking up different roles facilitated the transition between home and host countries. Engaging in “survival jobs” at some point in time (Graham & Thurston, 2005; McCoy & Masuch, 2007) enabled participants to supplement family income while husbands were fully invested in building their careers. In some instances, participants waited for their husbands to settle down in their careers fully before engaging in steps to advance their own careers, thus supporting Iredale’s (2005) observation of women delaying their accreditation process unless their husbands completed the same. Under these circumstances, participants had less discretion in choosing what work they wanted to do, thereby leading them to focus on short-term or job-related goals over more enduring career-related goals.

Another key finding that pertained to the theme of maintaining equilibrium for participants upon migration was their relational decision-making. The study highlighted the centrality of relationships in women’s career decision-making and CID (Hackett, 1997), where participants made career choices in view of managing multiple life roles and family obligations (Davey, 1998; Eccles, 1987; Fitzgerald & Weitzman, 1992). Within the same relational context of career decision-making, participants were often seen prioritizing family related commitments over personal goals (Branden, 2014; Iredale, 2005; Lalande, Crozier, & Davey, 2000).

**Tippling point.** After years of trying to balance various roles and family expectations, there came a point for most participants in their lives when they stopped for a moment, took a

step back and realized what they had been missing in terms of having a career. Represented as the theme related to *tipping point*, participants “tipped” towards taking agency by revisiting their career goals and seeing how they could optimize their individual circumstances. This marked a critical juncture in their CID, almost like a “wake-up call” towards resurrecting the career that fell apart during their transition to a new country and further taxed by childcare responsibilities upon immigration. The tipping point for most participants happened when families stabilized financially and/or when their children started going to school, freeing up time to focus on themselves. With older children and their husband’s changed circumstances over time, “these women’s priorities shift and decisions about occupational directions are made” (Lalande, Crozier, & Davey, 2000, p. 200). For other participants, their tipping point was brought about by receiving positive affirmation from significant others who encouraged them to pursue their career goals before it was too late to rebuild a career. Participants started letting go of their former career aspirations and began a process of grieving the loss of a career path they desired upon migration.

**Grieving the loss of preferred career trajectory.** Regardless of their professional backgrounds and duration of time spent in Canada, all participants faced numerous barriers in their career-building efforts upon migration, as documented widely in the career literature (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Chen, 2008; Reitz, 2001; Yakushko et al., 2008). Unable to access their pre-migration occupations, like most immigrants (Bauder, 2003; Tolley, 2003), participants engaged in a process of grieving the loss of their preferred career trajectories upon migration. Migration led four out of six participants (Aduna, Chandi, Jamie, and Swati) to leave their career path midway resulting in an apparent loss of power and freedom they associated with having a career. There is evidence to show that interruption or abandonment of career for accompanying spouses of expatriates on foreign assignments can lead to feelings of loss of power, identity, self-worth, and independence which, in turn, has a rippling effect on other family members (Brown, 2008). Several studies reveal that loss of personal and professional networks upon immigration and inability to resolve career issues, both within domestic and international migration contexts, can lead to identity issues in the personal, social, and work-related domains for accompanying spouses (Bayes, 1989; Catalyst, 1987; McNulty, 2012), thereby triggering a process of reconstruction of identities (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). In a study using an existential framework

to explain the retraining experiences of immigrants, McInnes (2012) discussed a grieving process akin to participants’ threatened career identities following migration.

Most participants experienced a disconnect between what they set out to achieve versus what unfolded upon migration. They further expressed disappointment at the pace and direction with which they could realize their career goals due to various obstacles they faced after coming to Canada. Metz et al. (2009) note that barriers may be an important contributing factor in the “aspiration-expectation discrepancy” (p. 157). Perhaps, participants’ expectations related to their career goals and anticipated employability prospects upon migration were influenced by factors such as level of education and previous employment history, as noted in past research. In a study on the immigrating experiences of Pakistani women, Khan and Watson (2005) observed that the higher the educational and professional profile of participants and their husbands, the greater the feelings of loss and pain with regard to their careers. Another source of disappointment for participants came from the discrepancy between admissibility criteria to Canada and employment-related criteria, as has been noted by several scholars (Khan, 2007; Tang, Oatley, & Toner, 2007). Feelings of disappointment and unmet expectations by participants also led them to question their self-worth, especially if they enjoyed their professional status in their home countries. There is evidence to suggest that loss of educational and occupational identity upon migration to Canada often lead immigrants to experience an overall sense of inadequacy, loss of skills, ability, and self-worth (Sinacore et al., 2009).

The process of coming to terms with the inconsistency between pre-migratory occupational expectations and post-migration experiences is not easy. Despite bracing themselves for a “not-so-easy ride” after coming to Canada, according to some participants, nothing quite prepared them for what they had to undergo to establish themselves career-wise. All these participant accounts indicate that educated and skilled immigrants are often surprised, disappointed, and upset upon facing barriers to their career development in Canada (Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; Dean & Wilson, 2009).

**Taking agency.** Recently, a small but promising body of research has emerged in identifying the role of helpful factors in immigrants’ successful career transition (Amundson et al., 2011; Koert et al., 2011; Vojdanijahromi, 2016; Zheng, 2010). The findings from the present study adds to this growing trend by highlighting some of the facilitative aspects that immigrant women faced in their career-building efforts. Support of family members, friends, and colleagues

(Vodjanijahromi, 2016), access to government and community resources (Koert et al., 2011) related to funding education and free language classes, and a positive attitude, flexibility, and persistence (Amundson et al., 2011) were some of the examples that participants provided. However, participants saw limits to having these supports. It dawned upon them that no change can happen unless they took it upon themselves to regain control of their career path. This essentially meant a deliberate attempt to combine intention and action to achieve positive outcomes related to their career (Chen, 2006; Cochran, 1990, 1997). Utilization of available resources helped participants rekindle their sense of agency, which in turn helped them put their careers back on track. According to some participants, it was qualities such as persistence, hard-work, and self-motivation that got them closer to their career goals rather than their academic credentials. All these examples suggest that participants adopted a proactive approach alongside demonstrating a “willingness to tolerate challenging circumstances” (Vodjanijahromi, 2016, p. 70), each of which enabled them to further their career goals. Taking agency seemed to facilitate the next steps in CID, which involved the process of renegotiating career identities by finding parallels to previously held career aspirations or discovering one’s calling.

**Redirecting one’s career path.** By acknowledging their changed work reality and a better understanding of their strengths and limitations within the Canadian context they found themselves in, participants were now better equipped to renegotiate their career identity in the host country (Chen, 2008). Taking control of their work-life again allowed participants to find parallels to previously cherished career goals or provided them an opportunity to discover their calling. While finding parallels permitted participants to stay close to their former career goals, it also reflected a process of compromise where participants quit pursuing desirable career options due to perceived incompatibilities. This finding is reminiscent of Gottfredson’s (1996) Theory of Circumscription and Compromise where many participants compromised their vocational goals in the face of career-related barriers, settling for a good choice of career rather than their preferred choice.

Other participants renegotiated their career identity by opting for a lateral move in hopes of transferring their existing skills to explore other career options. In other cases, through sheer happenstance, immigration provided participants with a chance for doing something completely orthogonal to what they thought they were meant to do. According to the theory of Planned Happenstance (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999), “chance” plays a key role in one’s career

development, where unpredictable events may provide opportunities for learning and growth for an individual’s career. The theory further postulates that career growth is possible only when individuals exhibit open mindedness in turning these chance events into positive learning experiences, as was demonstrated by a few participants.

While the disrupting effects of immigration on career development seems to be a highly researched area, the enhancing effects of immigration as they relate to pull factors by the host country for career growth opportunities appear relatively scarce. For instance, migration offered participants an opportunity to relive the career dreams they could not pursue due to the barriers they encountered in their home countries, such as inability to go back to school after marriage or parental pressure to pursue certain career choices. It was immigration that afforded some participants the chance to make good on those cherished goals by seeking new opportunities. This is consistent with studies related to the experience of trailing spouses of expatriates on foreign assignment, where they viewed moving to a new country as an opportunity to explore new horizons (McNulty, 2010). After redirecting their career path either through logical progression or chance events, participants appeared to have a more sharpened focus on career goals that were potentially useful in achieving career-related success and strengthening of their career identity.

**Emergence of a strengthened career identity.** After a seemingly arduous journey of repositioning themselves vis-à-vis their career goals in the changed context, most participants ended up with what appeared to be a strengthened career identity. The evolution of a strengthened career identity post-migration was a slow yet dynamic process for participants who had each spent more than ten years in Canada. Consistent with research, women spent these years acquiring opportunities for retraining, education and language fluency, and figuring out their career interests within their changed circumstances—all of which led to improved employment outcomes (Renaud & Cayn, 2006; Stewart & Hyclak, 1984). Previous research also suggests that it takes minimally 10 years for new immigrants to realize their economic potential and to achieve similar employment outcomes as their Canadian-born counterparts (Beiser, 2005; Statistics Canada 2008b), as was the duration of time spent in Canada by participants who described having a strengthened career identity.

These participants voiced an overall sense of satisfaction and pride in their career-related accomplishments they achieved to date. A strengthened career identity also implied fulfilling the

values most participants sought within a career. While some expressed satisfaction related to having job security in their present careers, others were happy to gain back their financial independence and decision-making power. Still others were thrilled at the prospect of making meaningful contribution to society through their careers. Participants also felt that having a sound career helped them feel more integrated in Canada, something they desired during the early phase of settlement. These findings support previous research which has demonstrated that economic integration is vital for the successful cultural transitioning of immigrants (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991; Yost & Lucas, 2002).

However, this last theme titled “emergence of a strengthened career identity” did not necessarily represent a final destination, but one among other potential high points in the career journey of women arriving on a dependent visa. Participant responses suggest that there might be possibilities for change in career goals and implications for CID in the future. This supports the fluid and ever changing nature of career identity which is in constant flux, and shaped by varying circumstances.

### **Temporality in Career Identity Development and Process of Deconstruction and Reconstruction**

The goal of this study was not to build a theory related to CID, but rather to unveil themes related to CID and their possible connections. While there were several possible ways to analyze the data, following Corbin and Strauss’s (2008) definition of conceptual ordering, the analysis that I conducted for a meaningful arrangement of data was in terms of temporality. In other words, the unifying thread that seemed to hold all themes together appeared to be temporal in nature, in relation to participants’ pre- and post-migratory experiences. For example, the following excerpt from Sarah is illustrative of some of the temporal relatedness between different themes such as “Maintaining Equilibrium,” “Tipping Point,” “Grieving the Loss of Preferred Career Trajectory,” and “Taking Agency”:

*You know I was in a new country alone with a child now. So I never missed a career at that point because I was trying to build a life, you know. And it’s not until now when my children have gone to school that now I think, “Oh I do miss my career” you know. I should go out and find a career and see what I can do because I feel it is necessary for both people to contribute to the household.*

In the above quote, “trying to build a new life” refers to maintaining equilibrium. Reference to reflecting on career after children have left for school represents the tipping point followed by grief (“Oh I do miss my career”) and taking agency (“I should go out and find a career and see what I can do because I feel it is necessary for both people to contribute to the household”).

Conceptualizing CID as a temporal construct and life-long process contributes to understanding why and how career identity changes over time. According to Oyserman (2007, 2009), identities serve as a meaning-making lens and help orient one’s attention to certain features of their immediate surrounding. Choices that feel identity-congruent in one situation may not necessarily feel identity-congruent in another situation (Oyserman et al., 2012). These identities could be in the realm of personal, social, and vocational contexts. Due to their new work-life reality, participants were compelled to surrender their professional titles (e.g., “teacher,” “researcher,” and “accountant”) in favour of career roles that felt more compatible with their new circumstances. Consequently, a strengthened career identity upon immigration involved processes of “deconstructing” and “reconstructing,” with the former usually taking place before the latter. To make way for reconstructed identities, participants had to dismantle what they had previously held on to. Participants actively engaged in both these processes of deconstructing and reconstructing their career identities by demonstrating adaptability, flexibility, and intentionality. This notion of CID reflects a nonlinear process, and corresponds to the conceptual framework of constructivist approaches to career development. The constructs of identity, adaptability, intentionality, and narrativity are useful to understand vocational behaviour within narrative approaches such as Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005). Due to its context-dependent nature, identities are in a state of constant flux. Under challenging circumstances, identity revision becomes inevitable in order to cope with the new demands (Heinz, 2002). This was true for participants in the study; when their career identities based on their work experience in their home countries could not meet the demands of their new work environment in Canada, they had to purposefully engage in a process of re-scripting their identities to navigate their career transitions post-migration.

The fluid nature of the construct of career identity may also imply that it is never really “missing,” contrary to how one participant described her current career identity. This result is not surprising as studies have found that unemployment represents a stressful life event and is likely

to “have emotional, psychological and behavioural corollaries of disrupted or confused meaning, identity, affiliation, and negative feelings of self-esteem” (Herr & Cramer, 1996, p. 94). Although immigrant literature is replete with the loss of cultural and social identities during cross cultural transitions, only few scholars have discussed a loss of career identity upon migration. However, it is noteworthy that in the present study, CID is conceptualized as a continuous process which implies that career identities are never really lost, but may be threatened, weakened, or fragmented upon migration. This notion is supported by a constructivist perspective where identity formation is viewed as a life-long process; it is restructured and revised in response to self-relevant life experiences (Berzonsky, 1989).

### **Contributions and Implications**

The present study sheds light on how pre- and post-migratory experiences can impact the career trajectories of women arriving to Canada as dependents. Eight themes related to their CID were unveiled through this study which underscores the importance of paying attention to the career journey of accompanying spouses who often feel isolated during their career transitions from host to home country. Findings from the study have several implications in the areas of counselling and policy.

**Counselling.** Within counselling practice, some of the implications include conceptualizing CID as a process, exploring the term “dependent status”, normalizing the various experiences related to CID, such as, “grieving” and “maintaining equilibrium”, and exploring agentic capacity and narrative approaches with dependent immigrant women. These implications are discussed in detail below.

Conceptualizing *CID as a process* rather than a one-time destination can help with understanding how dependent immigrant women may navigate career transitions at different points in their lives borne out of their decision to migrate, and how their career identity develops over time. In particular, front-line counsellors could focus beyond immigrant women’s immediate employment or job-related goals upon arrival to Canada. Moreover, while immediate job-related experiences are an important part of CID, they may not necessarily align with immigrant women’s career aspirations—aspirations that newly migrated women may decide to put aside to deal with more immediate concerns related to settling in a new country. Focusing on both short- and long-term career goals (rather than just immediate goals) in light of migration may better serve career development.

Some immigrant women may view the term “*dependent status*” used in Canada’s immigration process as disparate from how they view themselves, and could have far-reaching implications for CID. The terms dependent or “trailing spouse” conjures an image of women “following” their partners and may overshadow the reality that they have the skills and professional background to develop a strong career upon migration. Since experiences of dependent status are wide ranging and potentially impactful to CID, counsellors should explore what the term means to immigrant clients they work with; this may help mitigate unhelpful impacts on perceived self-worth, ultimately looking beyond the dependent status to identify what clients stand for in terms of career.

Even though the model of CID proposed in this study is not meant to be a stage model, it highlights various points that immigrant women might move through in developing meaningful careers. This may prime counsellors to acknowledge and validate the different points as they unfold or assist clients in anticipating their possibility. For example, counsellors could normalize and allow space for a *grieving process* to address “what could have been,” a realization that may surface once time opens up amidst shifting salience in life roles. Counsellors may be able to support their clients in the process, eventually paving the way for new and meaningful career goals. Here, counsellors may draw from existential approaches that structure conversations around reconceptualizing loss as an opportunity to redefine oneself through meaning-making explorations (Cohen, 2003; Maglio, Butterfield, & Borgen, 2005). Another example may be to acknowledge efforts that clients make in *maintaining equilibrium* while performing multiple life roles. It may be helpful for counsellors to identify the various developmental needs that clients have while establishing counselling goals. These findings could assist counsellors in further understanding the role of relational needs and decisions in women’s immigration journeys.

Another contribution of this study regards an apparent “awakening” whereby immigrant women begin to connect differently with their agency in their career development. Left to their own devices, *taking agency* may occur well after immigrating upon recognizing that certain career aspirations will remain unmet. While agency may develop organically within an unfolding process, counsellors could explore agentic capacity with immigrant women to help identify and act on what they feel would encourage them to take control of and ownership in charting their career journeys along desired pathways and at time periods that feel right to them. This in turn

may facilitate immigrant women, arriving on a dependent status, to feel more integrated upon migration, both economically and culturally.

Finally, given that clients may go through a process of *deconstructing and reconstructing* their career identity upon migration, narrative approaches may be useful in counselling work with immigrant population. Under the narrative framework, counsellors could encourage clients to engage in storytelling and to create meaningful narratives of their life-career experience (Cochran, 1997).

**Policy.** Some of the study findings highlight potential systemic barriers that immigrant women might encounter with respect to their career development in a host country and may have implications for immigration policies. Counsellors addressing systemic barriers through forms of advocacy is consistent with the social justice perspective that is increasingly promoted within the field of counselling psychology as a fifth force (Ratts et al., 2016; Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, & Israel, 2006), and is also represented in literature on counselling immigrants (Chung, Bemak, & Grabonsky, 2011; Stewart, 2014).

Immigrant women are a group of people that face unique challenges with respect to credentialing issues as well as tensions between the labour market and their gender-based role within the family (Banerjee & Phan, 2015). Given that the immigration policy of Canada is tailored to meet the economic needs of the country, it would seem counterproductive to focus on only one half of the economic class. It is being increasingly acknowledged that “beyond respecting diversity”, counsellors must evaluate “how clients’ lives are bounded by political and organizational policies and access to resources” (Arthur & Collins, 2014, p. 172). Arthur and Collins (2014) further suggest an expansion of our counsellor responsibilities to include appropriate interventions at the systems level and not just limited at the individual level to ensure client well-being. In order to fully utilize the skills of women coming to Canada, it may be worthwhile to note Iredale’s (2005) caution of directing special attention towards “immigration policies to ensure that they are not only gender neutral but more importantly that they are gender sensitive to the needs and special circumstances of women” (p. 165). Further, efforts must be made to reduce the discrepancy between the criteria to admit immigrants in the country under the economic category and the criteria to successfully participate in the labour market upon immigration. While efforts are underway to reduce the gap between these two criteria, such as awarding points to accompanying spouses for language fluency and Canadian work experience,

realistic expectations need to be set by the host country by providing up-to-date pre-arrival information related to employment to reduce disappointment and frustration of women who hold promise for economic integration.

The characterization of accompanying spouses using terms such as “dependents” and “trailing spouses” has implications on how women perceive themselves, and likely how they are seen by others during cross-cultural transitions. Labels such as these may perpetuate feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth and may further stereotyping of immigrant women as weak and powerless. Therefore, it is recommended that terminology be revisited by making it more inclusive. Alternative terms, such as “accompanying spouses” or “common-law partners” may be considered to avoid stereotyping and making it more consistent with women’s own understanding of themselves as relying on their agency, inner strength, and resilience.

### **Limitations**

Results of this study may not be generalizable to all immigrant women as participants belonged to only the economic class of immigrants. Although measures were put in place to increase the trustworthiness of findings within this qualitative project, results from the study suffer from several limitations. In order to achieve more representation, during recruitment, care was taken to include participants who had spent varying lengths of time and who represented different originating countries. However, due to the failure to recruit any participant from organizations serving the immigrant community, the snowballing sampling technique was used. In the resulting participant sample, three out of six participants pursued a career in Early Childhood Education and each of these participants had spent more than ten years since migrating to Canada. It is likely that the field of Early Childhood Education may have been overrepresented in the study, giving rise to the possibility that the nature of CID may have looked different if other fields of career were taken into consideration.

Secondly, due to time constraints, a grounded theory inspired approach was used to unveil some of the themes related to CID by using a small sample size of six participants. To conduct a full-fledged grounded theory approach, a larger sample size will have to be used until theoretical saturation is achieved, which in turn may yield fewer or more themes than the ones generated in the study. Therefore, the results obtained in this study may only be considered provisional in nature and should be regarded as a potential foundation for an emergent theory only (Truell, 2011).

Thirdly, only the experiences of immigrant women settled in Eastern Ottawa were considered in the study. It is possible that if other regions of Canada were considered, that varied in the way they are socially structured or in terms of availability of resources/supports, it may have generated different kinds of experiences related to CID. Given this limitation and the study's small sample size, results of this study may not be generalizable to all immigrant women. However, the results do offer insight into CID and contribute to the scarce literature available on those migrating with dependent status within the economic category, a relatively neglected group within immigrant literature.

### **Future considerations**

The limitations of the study may serve to provide opportunities for future research. Although this study uncovered some preliminary themes and subthemes related to the CID of women on a dependent visa, the results from this study may be elaborated upon by conducting a formal grounded theory approach and using a larger sample size. A wider representation of careers must be sought from participants who have achieved career stability over several years post-migration to increase the transferability of results. Further, the temporal nature of CID seemed to be a significant aspect, and therefore it may be worth exploring in future research.

Secondly, the present study chose to include only women who accompanied their husbands to Canada under the economic category. Future studies may include dependent women immigrants from other visa categories, as well as men arriving to Canada on a dependent visa to gain a complete understanding of how the entry status of individuals arriving to Canada interacts with gender to influence CID. Qualitative studies comparing the career-related experiences of men and women may be another research worthy area to explore in future.

Thirdly, research related to CID of immigrants as a whole must not only focus on the impediments to establishing a career, as has been mostly the focus within immigrant literature, but also the facilitative experiences that aid in developing meaningful careers. In order to get a better understanding of CID, both types of experiences must be considered while drawing any conclusions related to the developmental process of career identity of immigrants.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Most women arriving as dependents under the economic class of immigrants to Canada represent a group of professionally qualified individuals, holding potential to integrate within and contribute to the labour market. However, upon migration, they are often forced to engage in

a process of renegotiating their career identities due to their intersectionality of gender and entry status. Eight themes related to the CID of these women were unveiled in the current study, which shed light on some of the challenges and facilitators that immigrant women face in establishing their careers upon arrival to Canada. The qualitative nature of the study highlighted some of the in-between processes that women undergo during their transition from home to host country with respect to their career identities, and contributes to the scarce literature available on the career adjustment of women arriving as accompanying spouses of economic migrants. Results from the study have implications for immigration policies and counselling practices in Canada.

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### **Appendix A: Researcher’s Pre-understandings**

As an instrument of research, it is expected that my biases and preconceptions with regard to the phenomenon may creep into data collection and data analysis procedures. Therefore, at the outset, I would like to make my pre-understandings of the phenomenon known to all my readers.

My interest in the phenomenon of career identity development is old and personal as I arrived to the West as an immigrant on a dependent visa, about ten years ago. In my opinion, the development of career identity is a dynamic process that results from the cumulative experiences of both facilitating and hindering instances in a career context. As a member of the female immigrant community, I believe that the development of career identity is sensitive to changes in a woman’s context which may include events such as immigration, marriage, and having children. In addition to these gender specific events that likely occur in most women’s life, “dependent” status adds another layer of complexity in terms of achieving career goals at a desirable rate. This will be more applicable for immigrants coming from cultures with traditional gender roles, where men are considered as the primary “caregiver” and women as the primary “caretaker.” Women are socialized to prioritize family over personal needs, as a result of which they may pay less attention to the advancement of their career goals.

Based on my personal and theoretical understanding of the phenomena, I believe immigrants particularly from developing countries face more systemic barriers than immigrants from advanced countries. This relates to devaluation of foreign human capital and lack of “Canadian Experience” leading to poorer employment outcomes. As an immigrant from a developing country, I experienced institutionalized barriers that devalued my academic credentials and posed legal limitations on my ability to secure a paid position. As a female, I also faced challenges such as lack of social support system during my child-bearing and childcare responsibilities. Despite having a supportive partner, I had to suspend my career-related activities till the time I believed my family was ready for my transition from being a stay-at-home mom to pursuing full-time graduate studies. All these events had me continuously construct and reconstruct my career identity in light of how I perceived my interests and abilities in terms of acceptable career roles.

My engagement with a research project a few years back had me believe and prove statistically that women as a group face more educational and career-related barriers than their male counterparts. This resulted in a higher rate of attrition for women from science-based careers than men. This rings partially true for my own life experiences as well as the anecdotal experiences I have heard from other female immigrants I have met along the way. However, on the other hand, research findings from this study also shed light on the effect of perceived facilitators in pursuing career-related goals. These included availability of positive role models, and financial and social support. Despite some of the challenges I faced in establishing my career post-migration, I realized the importance of certain experiences that helped me fulfill some of my career goals. Some of these included working as a voluntary researcher at an American University that bolstered my application to North American Universities for graduate studies. Adopting a proactive approach by publishing my research and having mentors guide me through

my educational path, encouraged me to reach beyond my abilities. Together, these events had a positive influence in shaping my career identity, which continues to evolve to this day.

In sum, I believe that while immigrant women arriving to Canada on a dependent status may face challenges in establishing themselves in a career-related context as compared to their male counterparts, growth promoting experiences such as having mentors, volunteering, and a strong financial and social support may enhance career opportunities. I believe it is a cumulative experience of the facilitating and hindering experiences related to a career that will impact a female immigrant’s career identity development.

Given my preunderstandings of the phenomenon, it is likely that I may unknowingly interpret others’ experiences with the same lens. Therefore, I will make a conscious effort to keep an open mind while listening to participants’ story without imposing my biases and analyzing it in a manner that forefronts their voice.

**Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire**

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender:  Female  Male  Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

3. Country of origin: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Number of years since you migrated to Canada: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Current legal status in Canada:

Temporary Visa  Permanent Resident  Canadian Citizen

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

6. Marital status:  Married  Unmarried  Divorced/Separated  Widowed

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you have any children:  Yes  No

If yes, please specify the ages of all your children \_\_\_\_\_

8. Post-secondary education history

Bachelor's degree  Specify field \_\_\_\_\_  Year \_\_\_\_\_

Master's degree  Specify field \_\_\_\_\_  Year \_\_\_\_\_

Ph.D  Specify field \_\_\_\_\_  Year \_\_\_\_\_

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

9. Current employment status

Employed  Unemployed  Student

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you work:

Full time (more than 35 hours/week or more)  Part time (less than 35 hours/week

Not applicable

11. Employment history in country of origin:

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

12. Employment history in Canada:

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Duration of employment \_\_\_\_\_

13. Post migratory career-related decisions (Check all that apply)

Pursued/pursuing college degree  Pursued/pursuing diploma/certificate course

Pursued/pursuing bridging courses  Pursued/pursuing professional training

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

14. Any other information you would like to share:

### **Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ (MM/DD/YY)

Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee #: \_\_\_\_\_

Career identity regards how people see their career-related potential and interests over time, including what they wish to pursue career-wise and what their thoughts are about it. Specific to immigrant’s experiences, career identity also refers to a person’s career expectations and achievements before immigrating compared to those after having immigrated.

#### **Understanding of “Career Identity”**

1. What does the term “career identity” mean to you?

#### **Pre- migratory decisions**

1. Can you tell me how the decision for you and your family to migrate to Canada was made? What was the basis of deciding who the principal applicant and the dependent applicant would be between you and your partner? What role did you play in the decision-making process?

2. What were your thoughts/feelings/experiences during the process of deciding whether you would apply with a dependent status?

#### **Post-migratory decisions**

1. How would you characterize your career identity before you migrated to Canada and what do you think contributed to its development?

2. Did your career identity change after migrating to Canada. If yes, what were those changes and how would you describe them?

#### **Career decisions post-migration**

1. Upon migration, what are some of the key career decisions that you have taken so far? How did you go about making those decisions? What impact do you think each decision has had on your career identity?

#### **Perceived barriers and facilitators**

1. How would you describe your journey to establish yourself career-wise in Canada? Can you share specific instances of any facilitating or challenging experiences, including any turning points in your career journey?

#### **Career-related aspirations and expectations**

1. What did you aspire for in terms of having a career in Canada? To what extent were your expectations met? How did what you aspired for compare to what actually unfolded? How did any

difference between what you aspired for versus what actually unfolded impact your developing career identity?

2. How would you describe your current career identity?

**Concluding thoughts/remarks**

1. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel is important and we have not talked about?

**Appendix D: REB Ethics Approval Notice**

File Number: 02-16-05

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 03/21/2016



**Université d'Ottawa** **University of Ottawa**  
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

**Ethics Approval Notice**  
**Social Science and Humanities REB**

**Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)**

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Cristelle	Audet	Education / Education	Supervisor
Deepika	Rastogi	Education / Education	Student Researcher

File Number: 02-16-05

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: Exploring Career Identity Development among 'Trailing Spouses'

<u>Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</u>	<u>Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)</u>	<u>Approval Type</u>
03/21/2016	03/20/2017	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:  
 N/A

File Number: 02-16-05

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 03/21/2016



Université d'Ottawa  
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa  
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled “Special Conditions / Comments”.

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the “Modification to research project” form available at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca).

**Signature:**

Hoda Shawki  
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research  
For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

**Appendix E: Letter of Permission to Recruit through Mailing List**

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Deepika Rastogi and I am a student researcher working under the supervision of Dr. Cristelle Audet, at the University of Ottawa. This letter is a request for permission to recruit participants through your mailing list at IWSO/OCISO for a research project that I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in Counselling Psychology. The title of my research project is “Exploring Career Identity Development among Dependent Immigrant Women.” To help with the recruitment process, I would like to request your approval to send the attached email to the people on your mailing list.

With your permission, I am specifically looking to connect with women immigrants who have arrived to Canada on a “dependent” visa. The purpose of the study is to learn about their career-related experiences. My hope is that this study will enable us to deepen our understanding of career identity development among immigrant women and what might influence this process. If interested, participants will be invited to participate in a semi- structured interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. A study description containing information about the study and its procedures will be provided to all participants, along with my contact information as well as my thesis supervisor’s. If a member of your mailing list is interested in participating, she will be invited to contact me to discuss participation in this study in further detail.

I would like to emphasize that participation is completely voluntary. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time during the study. An informed consent form will be given to all participants. Names of participants or any other identifiable information will not appear in the thesis or reports resulting from this study. To support the findings of this study, quotations and excerpts from the interview will be used, labeled with pseudonyms (e.g. “Participant 1”) to protect the identity of the participants.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and has received approbation from the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity at the University of Ottawa, as attested by the attached certificate. If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about allowing me to recruit through your mailing list, please contact me or my supervisor at the contact information given below.

I will follow-up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

**Deepika Rastogi**  
Master’s Candidate  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

**Cristelle Audet, Ph.D.**  
Thesis Supervisor  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

**Recruitment text that would be sent out as email to list serv members as below:**

Subject: Participant recruitment for research project on career identity development

Hello,

My name is Deepika Rastogi and I am a Master’s student in the Faculty of Education at University of Ottawa. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research project with the purpose of exploring the development of career identity among immigrant women arriving to Canada on a “dependent” visa. Career identity regards how people see their career-related potential and interests over time, including what they wish to pursue career-wise and what their thoughts are about it. Specific to immigrant’s experiences, career identity also refers to a person’s career expectations and achievements before immigrating compared to those after having immigrated.

As a female immigrant on a dependent visa, I have faced my share of ups and downs while trying to adjust in a career context. However, I am interested in learning about career-related experiences from other immigrant women. This will enable an understanding of career identity development among immigrant women and the constructs that influence this process.

In order to be able to participate in this study, you must:

- Must identify as a woman and must be above 18 years of age
- Have arrived to Canada at least a year ago
- Be on a “Dependent” visa under the economic class of immigrants
- Have completed a minimum of four years of college education or diploma in home country
- Be able to communicate in English and have no mental health issues

If you choose to participate in the study, I will ask you to complete a demographic questionnaire and participate in a 45-60 minute sit down interview where I will ask you some questions related to your career in your home country as well as Canada. This will include sharing information related to you career trajectory before and after migration and the facilitators and challenges you have faced along the way. The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed, following which you shall receive a copy of the transcribed interview to verify the accuracy of the information you provided.

If you decide to participate in this study, I can assure you that all information will be treated with confidentiality. No person, other than my supervisor, will have access to de-identified transcripts as you will in no way be identifiable in the final study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to drop out of the study at any time. If you would like further information or have any questions or concerns, please feel free to get in touch with me over phone on a private number, which is only accessible to me or at my e-mail address.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Deepika Rastogi**  
Master's Student  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

### Appendix F: Study Description

My name is Deepika Rastogi and I am a Master’s student in the Faculty of Education at University of Ottawa. As part of my program requirements, I am conducting a research project with the purpose of exploring the development of career identity among immigrant women arriving to Canada on a “dependent” visa. Career identity regards how people see their career-related potential and interests over time, including what they wish to pursue career-wise and what their thoughts are about it. Specific to immigrant’s experiences, career identity also refers to a person’s career expectations and achievements before immigrating compared to those after having immigrated.

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- Be able to communicate in English and have no mental health issues

If you choose to participate in the study, I will ask you to complete a demographic questionnaire and participate in a 45-60 minute sit down interview where I will ask you some questions related to your career in your home country as well as in Canada. This will include sharing information related to you career trajectory before and after migration and the facilitators and challenges you have faced along the way. Responses to the demographic questionnaire and interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed, following which you shall receive a copy of the transcribed interview to verify the accuracy of the information you provided.

If you decide to participate in this study, I can assure you that all information will be treated with confidentiality. No person, other than my supervisor, will have access to de-identified transcripts as you will in no way be identifiable in the final study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free drop out of the study at any time. If you would like further information or have any questions or concerns, please feel free to get in touch with me over phone on a private number, which is only accessible to me or at my e-mail address.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Deepika Rastogi**  
Master’s Student  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

**Cristelle Audet, Ph.D.**

Thesis Supervisor

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

**Appendix G: Recruitment Poster**

**Have you migrated to Canada on a ‘dependent’ visa? Have you been living in Canada for at least a year?**

**Are you pursuing a career?**

If yes, then you may be eligible to participate in a research project in Counselling

As part of my Master’s thesis in Educational Counselling, at University of Ottawa, I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study on women immigrant’s career development. In order to participate:

1. You must identify as a woman and be above 18 years of age
2. Must have arrived to Canada on a “dependent” visa under Economic class of immigrants (with your spouse as the principal applicant)
3. Must have arrived at least a year ago
4. Must have a minimum of four years of college education or diploma in your home country
5. Must be able to communicate in English and have no mental health issues

If interested, you will be invited to participate in an interview, where you will be answering questions about your career-related experiences pre- and post-migration to Canada.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact: **Deepika Rastogi**

***This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance  
by the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Ottawa.***

**Appendix H: Screening Checklist for Recruitment**

To ensure eligibility to participate in this study, I will ask prospective participants the following:

1. Do you identify as a woman who is above 18 years of age?
2. Have you arrived to Canada at least a year ago?
3. Were you on a “dependent” visa under economic class of immigrants?
4. Did you complete a minimum of four years of college education or diploma in your home country prior to moving to Canada?
5. Do you feel able to express your thoughts and communicate in English?
6. Do you have any mental health concerns that you are aware of that may make it difficult for you to speak with me about your career-related immigration experiences?

## Appendix I: Informed Consent Form

**Researcher**

Deepika Rastogi  
Master’s Candidate  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

**Supervisor**

Cristelle Audet, Ph.D.  
Thesis Supervisor  
Faculty of Education  
University of Ottawa

You have been invited to participate in the study conducted by Deepika Rastogi, titled “Exploring Career Identity Development among Dependent Immigrant Women.” This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for completion of Deepika Rastogi’s M.A. degree with the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of Ottawa.

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this study is to explore the development of career identity among immigrant women arriving to Canada on a “dependent” visa.

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed about your career-related experiences prior to and after your migration to Canada. You will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Responses to the demographic questionnaire will be audio recorded. The interview will take approximately 45 - 60 minutes and will also be audio recorded to provide a record of our conversation for later transcription.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts:** A potential risk is that in discussing the challenging and facilitative aspects of your career-related experiences, some emotional discomfort may be experienced during or after the interview. While the potential risk is minimal, if you do experience discomfort at any time, please notify me so that I can provide you a list of resources to assist you with the discomforting emotions.

**Potential Benefits of Participation:** Participation in this study will help contribute to the knowledge of career identity development among immigrant women. This information may provide useful information to career counsellors who play a critical role in helping immigrants navigate through career transitions in a new country.

**Confidentiality:** Any information obtained in this study that could lead to your identification will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. In order to maintain confidentiality, all identifying information will be removed from the transcripts of audio recorded responses. Only the researcher and her thesis supervisor will have access to the data set.

**Data Collection and Storage:** The data collected will consist of your demographic information questionnaire, audio recording of your interview, and transcription of the interview. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Ottawa, in the researcher’s office. The data will be accessible to only Deepika Rastogi and Cristelle Audet. The data will be preserved for a minimum of five years after completion of the research study, at which point all data will be destroyed and disposed of.

**Participation and Withdrawal:** Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. This means that even though you agree initially to the interview, you can withdraw from the interview at any point. You may ask questions of the researcher at any time and you may refuse to answer any of the questions without any negative consequences.

If you have any questions, you may contact the researcher or her supervisor. There are two copies of the consent form, one of which you may keep. Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project can be addressed to the Protocol Officer of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the procedures described above and agree to participate in this study.

**Participant’s signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_